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LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR,

A SEASONABLE

DISCOURSE

IN

DEATH-THREATENING TIMES,

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SEVERAL SERMONS

Upon Psal. xxx. 5,

IN HIS FAVOUR IS LIFE.

BY OLIVER HEYWOOD,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL. *K*

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*John. Leach
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The Editor thinks it necessary to inform the public, that, in order to render this work more generally acceptable, he has taken the liberty of abridging a few passages ; and as some expressions are too antiquated for the taste of readers at the present day, he has endeavoured a little to modernise the language, where it could be done without altering the sense of the author.



AN
INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

To the
READER.

AMONG all the useful discourses which the press hath of late exposed to public view, I have not, as I remember, met with any which purposely and directly treated of the subject of this essay, notwithstanding it must be owned to be needful, useful, and at all times seasonable. It is not a point of controversy, but a maxim to which men generally subscribe, that, *In God's favour is life.*

All sorts of men plead for God's favour, and, in general, pretend to it. This is the case with persons of all religions, and of all persuasions. Men cannot bear the thoughts of an exclusion from it, whatever be their state or their conduct. Both the religious and the profane make pretensions to it. The rich and great cannot say they are above it, the poor and mean think themselves entitled to it. The grossly ignorant dream of God's favour, as their sanctuary, though the Most High hath said of such, "It is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and

he that formed them will shew them no favour." The learned Rabbies and sages of the world can gravely dispute about the grace and favour of God, with strong inclination to appropriate it to themselves. They are often ready to say of the illiterate, as the chief priests and pharisees of old, "This people who know not the law are accursed;" intimating that they themselves are high in God's account, and distinguished by his favour above their neighbours. But Jesus says to those who justify themselves, "That which is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God."

The aspiring *Nimrods* and the flattering *Absaloms* of the world, when they have the favour of princes or people, imagine they have the favour of the Almighty. But *Haman* and *Herod* soon received a confutation of this opinion; the one for his detestable pride, through divine indignation, was hanged like a dog; the other was smitten by an angel of the Lord, and his loathsome carcase eaten up of worms, because he gave not God the glory.

The unworthy, the greedy and griping sons of the good old *Eli*, who would be served first, and served with the best, or take their part by force, though they boasted of the ark, and trusted in it, supposing they had the Almighty in some sort engaged to them thereby, yet they themselves were miserably slain, and their posterity were brought
basely

basely to crouch for a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread.

Though carnal persons may bless the prosperous covetous man, we are told that God abhors him. If *Jeconiah* will set his eyes and heart only to his covetousness, and build himself a house by unrighteousness, and chambers by wrong, using his neighbours' service without wages, by divine appointment, he shall die unlamented, and be buried with the burial of an ass; the best part of his name shall be taken away, he shall only be called *Coniah*; and though he was as the signet on God's right hand, advanced to high and distinguished honours, yet the Almighty will pluck him thence and cast him down. Though the ambitious and impious king of *Tyre* be, in the estimation of some, as the anointed cherub, and say he is God, and set his heart as the heart of God, yet he shall be brought down to the pit.

Mystical *Babylon* may say, "I sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow; she may glorify herself, and boast of the peculiar favour of Him whose spouse she pretends to be; yet it will appear by and by, that she is the habitation of Devils; and her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; nay, she shall be utterly burnt with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her."

If haughty and self-righteous *Israel* fill the world with the loud acclamations of "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we, the church, the church; we are God's peculiar people, his portion, his chosen heritage;" yet the Most High can take his leave of *Jerusalem*, as he did of *Shiloh*, and cast the people out of his sight; and though they were to him once externally for a name, a praise and a glory; yet they shall become like a rotten girdle, that is good for nothing; yea, God will even dash them in pieces one against another, and will not pity nor spare them, because, notwithstanding their high pretensions, their hearts are far from him.

Chorazin and *Bethsaida* had mighty works done in them; they were highly favoured with the presence, the preaching and the miracles of Jesus, yet, because of their unbelief, it shall be more tolerable for *Tyre* and *Sidon* in the day of judgment than for them. *Capernaum*, which was exalted to heaven in privileges, for the like stupid insensibility, shall be cast down to the lowest hell in punishment.

The seven *Asian* churches may lose their splendor, be diminished and brought low. *Laodicea* thought herself rich and increased with goods, dignified with able preachers, splendid gifts of the Spirit, sound doctrine, and glorious privileges, on which accounts she judged herself more in favour with God than

than all the rest, and became vain and secure to that degree, that the threatening denounced against her is, "Thou art so offensive to me, that I will spue thee out of my mouth."

To be in the favour of God is a matter of infinite concernment, yet thousands in the world are mistaken about it. When death and judgment come, what discoveries will be made; what an awful disappointment will many meet with; especially such as expect the favour of God, and admission among the saints, on account of a mere outward profession, or of some acts of external obedience! Some will plead their excellent gifts in praying and preaching, for which they have been admired and applauded by men. Some will plead their high preferment in the church; and others say, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets." But the great Judge tells us, he will answer them all alike, with these awful words, "I know you not, I will not own you, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." It will be in vain for them to reply, "What! must we depart, who were civil with our neighbours, good church-men, orthodox believers, and sober livers! Must we depart who heard the word gladly, commended the preacher, practised
many

many things which we heard, had strong convictions, hated superstition, were pleaders for God's pure worship, and even took delight in approaching unto Him! Wilt thou not, on all these accounts, grant us favour? Must we indeed be banished from thee? O most dreadful disappointment!

Alas, alas! what a discovering, disanimating, confounding day will that be to many, who, upon self-flattering grounds were as confident of being in God's favour as if they had seen their names in his book! They would by no means be beaten off from this vain confidence; but they will now see themselves to have been wofully deluded by Satan, and their own deceitful hearts, when it is too late to cry for mercy.

The consideration of this deeply affects the minds of upright ministers. Their hearts ache, and their souls mourn in secret, on account of the pride and stupidity of self-deceivers. If we tell them there is danger; if we bid them search and deal plainly with their hearts, they look upon us as enemies, by raising in them unnecessary terrors, and giving false alarms. Some even deride our earnest endeavours, and bid us look to ourselves; for they know they are safe, and as high in God's favour as the best of us, though their whole temper and their walk give just ground of suspicion, that their hearts are not right in the sight of God. We are under the sad
neces-

necessity of leaving those, with painful fears that we shall never see them numbered with the saints at God's right hand, in the day when he maketh up his jewels.

Since the danger of being deceived is so great, and the consequences so awful, of what importance, my dear reader, is a real sense of interest in the divine favour! Ought it not to be sought with the greatest and most earnest solicitude? While men live in prosperity and affluence, and enjoy abundance of worldly comforts, they may live in a kind of security; drowning the noise of conscience, and lulling themselves asleep in the cradle of ease; yet a day is coming which shall burn as an oven, when all the proud and the profane shall be as stubble, and the day shall consume them, and leave them neither root nor branch. Their worldly wealth shall perish, and their delusive hopes give up the ghost, when the heavens shall be dissolved, and the earth tremble under their feet. O what will God's favour, and the smiles of the Redeemer's love be worth in that day, when he shall call the dead out of their graves, and command them to stand forth, that they may hear their final sentence of absolution, or of condemnation, according as their state shall be! Then, O then to have the favour of the Lord, the great Judge of heaven and earth, will be worth more than it is possible for language to express!

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The Almighty will presently summon us hence by his messenger death, the king of terrors, and say to us, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee; thou must go hence, and give an account of thy stewardship! O then what will a well-grounded hope of interest in God's favour be worth to us! Such a confidence is indeed of great importance to us while we live, whatever be our circumstances in outward respects. In prosperity, what can give rest to the capacious mind, which is ever looking beyond sublunary things for satisfaction? His favour alone can do it, the letters of whose name, in the *Hebrew* language, are called *quiescent*, even the great JEHOVAH. In adversity, there is still greater need of the divine favour. When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? But when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? In the day of calamity, God's favour is most seasonable, when it frequently happens that the favour of men is withdrawn, and all things look dark about us. What a sovereign support in trouble is the light of God's countenance! It is indeed light in darkness; it is life even in a dying hour.

Hence it is, that the children of God have earnestly desired and sought some tokens of his love, while they have been in this vale of tears. Let others think lightly as they please, of this their importunity, the divine word gives encouragement to it.

it. "Call upon me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Our gracious Redeemer says, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." This is a sufficient warrant for our prayers and expectations in God's way. We have the divine precept to direct and regulate our desires, and the promise of grace to encourage our hope of success. God has promised great things to those who seek him, and his promises have been made good in instances without number.

What that *token for good* was, for which holy David prayed, *Pf. lxxxvi. 17.* I will not positively determine; but without doubt it was some evidence of God's favour to him, in his ordinances, or by his providence, for the confirmation of his faith, the quickening of his soul, and the comforting of his heart.

It must be owned, if this man after God's own heart, had some special ground to expect extraordinary manifestations of divine power in his favour, in a miraculous way, it becomes not us to follow his example in this instance. We have no such ground to go upon as he might have. Let us adhere to the law and to the testimony, and look for such tokens of the divine favour as God has promised to afford.

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The ordinances of God are tokens of his favour. He gave the sabbath to *Israel* as a sign of his being their soveraign, as a nation. The ark was a token of his presence, as the word and ordinances are among us. God forbid that we should be deprived of these indications of his mercy. A famine of the word would be a sore calamity indeed. The people of *Antioch* were so sensible of the privilege of sitting under the lively and fervid ministrations of the gospel, that they once said, in the warmth of their zeal, "We had better be deprived of the light of the sun, than of the preaching of *Chrysostom*."

It is a token of God's favour when the word and ordinances are rendered efficacious. When this and that man are born in *Zion*, it is a sign of his mercy to her, and that the Most High will establish her. O that the Spirit of the Lord may be poured forth on his ministers and churches in this our day! Where is the Lord God of *Elijah*? It is a rich and great mercy to see a day of his power, when sinners are made willing in the beauties of holiness.

It is a token of God's favour when the Spirit of supplication is plentifully bestowed, and his people stirred up to earnestness in seeking him. When he prepares the heart to pray, it is an indication that he will cause his ear to hear. A lukewarm and slothful disposition is a sad token of God's anger and absence. "There is none that calleth upon thy name,

name, that stirreth up himself to take hold on thee : for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities."

It is a token of God's regard when he bestows a penitent heart, and a deep concern for reformation. This is apparent in the case of the *Ninevites*. O that God may pour upon us his Holy Spirit, in his humbling, quickening, and sanctifying influences. This will be a token indeed of our interest in his favour.

The heavenly Comforter bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, is a blessing of unspeakable value, and greatly to be desired. "I entreated thy favour," says the Psalmist, "with my whole heart," the comfortable sense and enjoyment of it, the sweet assurance of interest in it. This is life indeed. Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us! shed abroad in our hearts the love of Christ, by the Holy Ghost given unto us, that we may no longer anxiously doubt of our safety, but, according to the command of our divine Redeemer, rejoice that our names are written in heaven. Let the Holy Spirit of promise seal us, by way of security, to the day of redemption, that we may know, with heart-felt satisfaction, that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

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The Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance. An earnest is a part of the payment, of the same nature with that which we hope hereafter to receive. His graces and comforts are the grapes of *Canaan*, morsels of the upper table, preludes and foretastes of eternal enjoyments. How much are these to be desired!

Suppose we were in the state of condemned malefactors; the king, our offended sovereign holds out unto us a sealed pardon, and declares, at the same time, that such as have not the great seal to shew, must suffer for their crimes; but such as have it, must be acquitted, and received to his royal favour. What solicitude should we feel in such a case as this, that we might have a sealed evidence of the king's pardon! What diligence should we use, what pains should we take! And can we be indifferent in a matter of infinitely greater moment, when, not the life of the body only, but the eternal salvation of the soul is depending? When our offended Judge saith, "Only acknowledge your offences, and seek ye my face," shall not our hearts echo to the gracious overture, "Thy face, Lord, will we seek?"

Reader, this is the design of the small treatise which is now put into your hands; and O that it may please God to succeed our endeavours, and accompany our preaching and our printing with his blessing!

blessing! A match is proposed between Jesus Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, and your poor souls. He hath drawn up the articles, and propounded them to you by us. His sacred words speak his willingness; nothing is wanting but your consent; and the match is made. We bring you letters of love and kindness from the divine Saviour, who is ready to betroth you to himself for ever. We endeavour to shew you the large dowry he proposes to give, and the glorious mansion prepared for you, in which you shall dwell with him for ever. We tell you of the pains he has endured, and the cost he has been at, to make you his own. Whether all this will prevail upon you, whether it will win your hearts to him or not, the event must declare. But if this were the last sentence I must write, or you read, I do hereby summon you to answer to this address before that awful tribunal, where you and I must shortly appear. If you reject the gospel of salvation, and persevere in your rebellion against God, undoubtedly the ministers who have tenderly and faithfully warned you, will be witnesses against you. But O! how earnestly do I wish that it may be otherwise! It is our work to preach and write, your's to hear and read; but the Father of mercies alone can give success. We therefore follow these poor endeavours with our hearty prayers to him, that he may be graciously pleased to bestow upon you, converting or confirming grace; that you may expe-

rience the manifestations of his favour ; or, being in a state of grace, that you may walk in the light of his countenance, and abound unto every good work, that we may give up our account of you with joy and not with grief ; so that those who sow and those who reap may, at length, rejoice together. This is the sincere desire and prayer of

The Friend of your souls,

OLIVER HEYWOOD.

Nov. 9, 1678.



LIFE IN GOD'S FAVOUR.

CHAP. I.

SOME INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

Psalms xxx. 5. In his Favour is Life.

THE divine poem in which we meet with these words, bears the title of *A psalm and song at the dedication of David's house*. What is intended by this dedication, or with what ceremonies it was performed, we are not told. *Moses* said to the armies of *Israel*, when going out to battle, "What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in battle, and another man dedicate it." *Hiram*, king of *Tyre*, sent messengers to *David*, and cedar-trees, and carpenters, and masons, and they built *David* an house. Whether this psalm

was composed when he first became an inhabitant of this house, or when he returned to it after *Abfalom* had defiled it, I will not determine. This holy man was concerned to have his habitation to be an house for God, and devoted to him; where his name should be called upon, and his praises sung, whose favour is to be valued infinitely above all earthly enjoyments, and is that which sanctifies and ennobles them all.

The psalm which was composed and sung on this occasion, may be called, a divine miscellany, descriptive of the various experiences of a child of God. I shall just hint at a few particulars.

The Psalmist here exalts God in his praises, who had exalted him in the manifestations of his mercy. "I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast lifted me up." When the Father of mercies has brought us up out of the depths of distress and indigence, we ought to give him the glory; and the higher our advancement is, the more exalted should be our praises. This is a delightful, as it is a reasonable service.

David had cried to God, and experienced his present help and healing, in bodily affliction, domestic trouble, and distress of mind. "I have cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." Relief was near. It was but asking with fervour and sincerity, and the great Physician was ready, with his healing hand,

hand, to remove his domestic distractions, to restore his decayed health, and to pour the oil and wine of heavenly consolation into the wounds of his mind. He was raised up from the borders of the grave, and preserved from going down to the pit. He had been brought into the greatest dangers, as to his property, his kingdom, and his life; his soul, through oppressive terrors, horrid temptations, and deep despondency, had been near the pit of hell, to his own apprehension; but God, in answer to his cries, had mercifully delivered and restored him. "O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit."

Hence the Psalmist, as might be supposed, was deeply affected with the manifestations of divine goodness in his favour. His heart was warm and full of gratitude. He invites others to assist him in praising his merciful Deliverer. "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his." We see here, that prayers, fervent and earnest prayers, shall in due time be turned into praises. The more we abound in prayer, the more shall we be furnished with matter of praise. And in this delightful employment, it is desirable to have the company of our fellow-saints, that we may join in holy concert, somewhat like the happy society above. In heaven, the blessed choir of saints
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and angels sweetly unite in unceasing songs of gratitude and praise. Those whom *David* invites to assist him in this joyful work, are the saints; who so proper as holy souls to give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness?

The Psalmist intimates, that he had tasted both of God's displeasure and of his love, in a short space of time. "His anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." The peculiar manifestations of divine mercy are sometimes preceded by seasons of distress and discouragement; a storm is before a calm; the thundering terrors of the law before the joyful sound of the gospel; the strong wind, earthquake and fire, before the small still voice; that we may, by a night of darkness, be prepared for a morning of light, and know how to prize it.

David owns the strong disposition he had felt to security and carnal confidence in a prosperous state; "In my prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved. Thus I flattered myself, when my path was smooth, and I had the full enjoyment of health and tranquillity." O deceitful heart! A healthy man thinks not of sickness. "God built me a house; I built myself a castle; but it was a castle in the air, the baseless fabric of a vision, which had a sudden fall."

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A deceitful imagination allures a man into a fool's paradise. When things go well, security kills us. When God shines on the mount of transfiguration, we dream of building tabernacles there; but a change soon takes place. "Thou didst hide thy face, and I am troubled; the withdrawing of the light of thy countenance deprived me of my comforts." The turning away of God's face overspreads the gracious soul with a heavy gloom, and beclouds its hopes and comforts. We ought to be perpetually dependent on him. Our mountain is supported by his hand, and when he withdraws it, we sink into a valley of despondency and dejection, if not to the very borders of despair.

In this case the Psalmist's voice was changed, from joyful praise to importunate supplication. "I cried unto thee, O Lord." How often do God's children, in this imperfect state, change their notes! Singing and sighing are frequently in near connection. The skilful painter can, with a few strokes of his pencil, turn a smiling into a sorrowful countenance. We find *David* here, at one time so full of joy, that he calls upon his fellow-faiths to help him to praise his gracious Benefactor; and very soon the scene is so changed, that he can do nothing but mourn and cry for deliverance. "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me; Lord, be thou my Helper." Again

Again we find the cloud dispelled. The Psalmist experienced a happy deliverance. His darkness is turned into light, his sorrow into joy, his hell into heaven. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness." What wonderful effects do the restored joys of God's salvation produce, in minds fervently set on heavenly things! He that was prostrate on the earth, repenting and mourning in the dust, in sackcloth and ashes, is now so transported with divine delights, that he seems almost at a loss in what way to express his gratitude. He is like one set at liberty from the restraints, the fetters and the darkness of imprisonment. He puts off his sackcloth, and is clothed with the garments of joy and praise.

The result of all is expressed in the last verse :
 "To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee,
 and not be silent; O Lord my God, I will give
 thanks to thee for ever." By his glory, the Psalmist
 means the best thing he had. His tongue was the
 glory of his frame, and that should be employed in
 speaking forth the honours of his Saviour. If by
 his glory, as some think, he means his soul, he re-
 solved that that, with all its powers, should be en-
 gaged in the delightful work of praise. "I will
 praise thee, O God, with my whole heart, I will

not

not be silent, I will not cease." The more we praise his gracious name, the more occasions of praise he will minister to us. Let us therefore say, with this holy man in another place, "I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more."

Through the whole of this psalm we see, to what changes the servants of God are subject in this life. Like mariners, they have sometimes a stormy, and sometimes a smooth sea; or like travellers by land, they have to pass over mountains of difficulty and danger, as well as through vallies of delights. And what a variety of affections are stirred up in their minds, upon several occasions! Joy and sorrow, fear and fortitude, eager desire and pleasurable satisfaction, take their turns, and act their several parts, in the breasts of those who are travelling towards the celestial country.

In the verse in which our text lies, we perceive both night and day; thunder and lightning, and the bright shining of the sun after rain; the lightsome and the dark side of the pillar of the cloud; the law and the gospel; wrath and love; these are compared, and set in opposition to each other. *For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

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The words, *In his favour is life*, seem to come in as a satisfying answer to a tacit objection formed by those who are invited to sing the praises of God, ver. 4. As if it had been said, Alas! How can we join in the pleasing work of thanksgiving. We lie under the tokens of God's displeasure, and seem to feel the marks of his anger within us. How can we sing the Lord's song, when our harps are hung on the willows?

The Psalmist answers this by a concession; "Be it so; it is proper there should be an interchangeable succession of joy and sorrow, as of day and night. Sorrow, like an unwelcome guest, may lodge with us during the night, but a blessed morning of deliverance succeeds. The season of disconsolation is but short; it will not last for ever; so far from this, God's anger is but for a moment, and in his favour is life." The displeasure and the favour of the Most High are here compared, in their nature and their duration.

The displeasure of God occasions a night of sorrow and distress. Night in scripture often denotes a season of gloom and disconsolation. The gracious soul is under great discouragement when the Sun of righteousness is withdrawn. If the wrath of a king be as the messengers of death, how afflictive must a sense of God's displeasure be, to the man who looks
for

for all his felicity from him! But in his favour is life; it is that which gives being to all the hope, the peace and comfort of a saint. He lives by the shining of his heavenly Father's countenance.

The divine displeasure is but for a moment; the gloominess occasioned by it is but for a night. At longest, the season of affliction and sorrow can but continue during the period of a good man's pilgrimage through this vale of tears; but the favour of God is life everlasting; it runs parallel with the existence of the soul, and with the line of eternity.

The former part of this verse, because short and concise, seems rather intricate; but in the latter, the Psalmist more fully unfolds his meaning. Anger, by an usual figure, is put for chastisement, which, among earthly parents, is frequently the effect of anger. The Supreme Being is not angry as men are; yet he visits the transgressions of his children with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes, though he will not take away his loving-kindness from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail.

The words in the *Hebrew* text lie thus, *A moment in his anger; in his favour life.* Life is opposed to a moment, as favour is to anger. Displeasure is momentary, love is everlasting. The general sense of the passage appears to be this,—Though for our offences the Lord may hide his face, withdraw

his comforts, and visit us with affliction; yet he will speedily manifest his pardoning mercy, remove the chastisement which indicated his displeasure, and restore to us the joys of his salvation. This renewed manifestation of favour will produce so great a change in our state of mind, that it may be termed, a calling us back from death to life.

As my desire is to instruct and edify the reader, and not to perplex him, I shall not introduce the laboured criticisms of some learned writers upon the words under consideration, nor attempt any farther explication of them, but immediately propound this doctrinal proposition arising from the text,

That *In God's favour there is life*; or that his favour is a good man's life.

This is the branch of divine truth held forth to our notice, by the royal Psalmist here. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he advanced this, as a faithful saying, and worthy of acceptance. *Moses* seems to assert the same thing, when he says of JEHOVAH, "He is thy life, and the length of thy days." That is, he is effectively so; he is the cause of thy life; whatever justly deserves the denomination of life, consists in the enjoyment of him, and consequently, in being conformed to his holy will.

In

In the prosecution of my design, I shall attempt to give a solution of the following inquiries ;

I. What are we to understand by the favour of God, and what that life is which is said to be in it ?

II. In what respects is his favour to be considered as life ?

III. To whom is it so, and in what seasons and circumstances ?

IV. Why do these persons put such a value on the divine favour, as to account it life ?

When I have given a short answer to these several important questions, I shall attempt a suitable application of the whole.

CHAP. II.

What God's Favour is, and the Life which is enjoyed in it.

WE are in the first place to inquire, what we are to understand by the favour of God, and what that life is which is said to be in it. For the sake of brevity, we unite these two necessary branches of investigation, in the present chapter, humbly requesting the reader to favour us with his candid, pious and impartial attention. The nature of the subject undoubtedly calls for it.

The word for *favour*, in the sacred original, signifies *good will*, or *good pleasure*. In the blessing wherewith *Moses* the man of God blessed the children of *Israel* before his death, we meet with this elevated apostrophe, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord!" The latter clause explains and illustrates the former. When men are full of the blessing of the Lord, they enjoy his favour; and it is that which gives them satisfaction. The word also signifies acceptance. The prophet *Isaiah* uses the same expression as that in our text; when speaking of the spiritual sacrifices which God's people shall present unto him, through the Mediator, he says, in the name of the great Jehovah, "They shall come up with acceptance, with favour, upon mine altar." Sometimes the term, in our *English* version, is rendered desire. As when the Psalmist says, "He shall fulfil the desire, the good will, of them that fear him." But as the expression is used concerning the Author and Fountain of all good, it implies, in its lowest sense, kindness or regard: and it may be considered in several points of light.

1. The favour of God may intend his common Providence towards all, both good and bad. Favour is shown to some who are little influenced by it. "Let favour be shewed to the wicked," in the boun-

bounties of an indulgent providence, "yet will he not learn righteoufness." In this sense, the divine favour is our natural life, both as to its original, and its continued preservation. All men, whether they be good or bad, are dependent on God's supporting hand; for he holdeth our soul in life. When a human artificer has constructed a machine, and put it in motion, he leaves it to itself. But our Almighty Maker has not formed us to subsist independent of his care. To his favour we are indebted, both for our being, and our well-being. It was the devout acknowledgment of *Job*, "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation preserveth my spirit." Life itself is a grant of his goodness, an instance of his favour, as well as that constant beneficence, whereby we are furnished with every needful and comfortable accommodation. The very heathens were sensible of this. When *Paul* had asserted, in his address to the Athenians, that God is near to every one of us, because in him we live and move and have our being, he quoted their own poet *Aratus*, in confirmation of what he had said,

For we his offspring are.

The stoutest champion on earth, the proudest monarch in the world, is dependent on God's favour, and lies at his mercy every moment. *Daniel* said

to the impious, the stout-hearted *Belshazzar*, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." O that men did but consider, and keep it constantly in their remembrance, that they owe all that they are, and all that they have and possess, to the favour of their Maker, their divine Benefactor and Sovereign! A late poet has well said,

Our breath is forfeited by sin,
To God's revenging law ;
We own thy grace, immortal King,
In every gasp we draw. *

2. By God's favour may sometimes be intended, the signal acts of discriminating providence. Thus the Lord shewed kindness to his ancient people *Israel*, in driving the seven heathen nations out of *Canaan*, the measure of whose iniquities was full, and in planting the seed of *Jacob* in their room. Why did he do this? It was not done because of their deserts; it was not effected by the power of their own swords, or their other weapons of war, but, says the Psalmist, in devout acknowledgment to

* The reader, it is hoped, will pardon the Editor's intrusive hints, as they are designed merely to illustrate the sense of the Author, and, in some sort, to enliven and modernise the performance. See the advertisement at the beginning.

to the Author of the benefit, "By thy right hand, and thy holy arm, because thou hadst a favour unto them." God's favour was their armour; it produced weapons of success, both offensive and defensive. For thou Lord wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou compass him, as with a shield. To this we are indebted for all that protection, that safety, and that comfort, which constitute what may be emphatically called *life*. "Thus," said *David* to his men, "shall ye say to him that liveth," that is, to him that is in the full possession of ease, plenty, and prosperity.

It is in this sense we are to understand the term *to live*, as used by the apostle *Paul*; "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." Does he mean, that they would die if it were otherwise? No; if ye stand fast in the Lord, we shall be very happy and comfortable. *Rebekah* complained of being weary of her life because of the daughters of *Heth*, "and," added she, "if *Jacob* take a wife of the daughters of *Heth*, what good shall my life do me?" A life of sorrow is a dying life, scarcely worthy of the name of life, in the estimation of him who is bitter in soul. But God's favour produceth relief, deliverance, comfortable provision and accommodations, which may be termed a kind of resurrection, or returning from death to life; so very great is the change.

change. We have an instance of this in *Hezekiah*, when God restored him from a mortal disease, and in love to his soul, redeemed it from the pit of corruption. "Thou wilt," says the Psalmist, "save the afflicted people; thou wilt light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness." A thousand dangers are prevented, pressing calamities are removed, and we are loaded with multitudes of benefits, whereby our lives are again rendered comfortable unto us. The ground of all this is the divine favour. It is owing to this that our life is not a continued scene of bitterness and woe, as our sins have deserved, but at times, through merciful deliverances, and favourable turns of providence, we taste the sweets of tranquillity, rest and joy, to that degree, that our hell is turned into a kind of paradise. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! We hear him saying of the man who is governed by his fear; "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." The Lord's people acknowledge themselves to be indebted to his fa-
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vour for the happy change of their circumstances. "Lord, thou hast been favourable to thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of *Jacob*. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger." All this may serve to confirm and illustrate the doctrine under consideration, *In his favour is life*.

3. By God's favour may be meant, his special and distinguishing grace and kindness, vouchsafed to his own children. It is in this sense we are to understand that ardent and pathetic request of the Psalmist, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour which thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation!" From this peculiar favour our spiritual life flows, as well as all the streams which nourish and feed that life. It is the fountain of regenerating and converting grace, whereby we are made to live unto God. It implants the seed of divine life in the heart; and they who thus live, live not unto themselves, but to him that died for them, and rose again. It is the favour of God which makes us his people. "It hath pleased the Lord," saith *Samuel*, "to make you his people." It is owing to this favour that the Lord takes complacency and delight in his saints. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

From this source are derived all the glorious gifts of gospel grace ; the gift of God's eternal Son, the revelation of him in the promises and proclamations of the divine word, the remission of our sins, the justification of our persons, the sanctification of our hearts, our communion with God, and our everlasting salvation. All the divine blessings and privileges which the people of God enjoy in this world, and all the felicity and glory which they shall possess in the world to come, proceed from the favour of God. His favour therefore is life, both spiritual and eternal. The faith by which we live to him here, is his gift, and a fruit of his favour. This is life eternal begun in the soul ; it is that which is worthy to be called *life*, without which we are dead, in a moral sense, and must die eternally. The divine Redeemer said to the woman at *Jacob's well*, " Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. It is no wonder therefore that the gracious soul says with the Psalmist, in his requests to God, " Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." The love of God to his people is their life, both spiritual and eternal.

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4. The favour of God sometimes is to be understood of the sweet, comfortable, and satisfying manifestation of it to the soul. When the Psalmist says, "I entreated thy favour with my whole heart;" we are to understand it in this sense. He not only prays for the blessings of his grace, but for the manifestation of his love, the light of his countenance, the shining of his face, the comfortable assurance of his special favour. Thus he expresses himself in another place, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." This is sometimes called the beauty of the Lord, his splendour, the light of his countenance; "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." For the enjoyment of this, the Psalmist desired that he might dwell in God's house, to "behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." The servants of the Most High in general, earnestly seek the manifestation of his favour, and look upon it as their light, their help, and health; nay, they value it as life itself. We find them frequently breathing out their souls in such language as this, "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved. O God, be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause thy face to shine upon us."

When a prince, a sovereign, a man of power and authority, is well pleased with his friends and
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dependents, he looks upon them with complacency, and converses with them with a placid and smiling countenance. This gladdens their hearts, and inspires them with chearfulness and pleasure. The light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain. *Solomon* observed this in his courtiers; and it serves to illustrate the assertion of his father *David* here, *In his favour is life*. When God manifests his love to his children, it turns their mourning into joy, it exhilarates and revives their drooping spirits, and gives them new life and vigour. While the men of the world are saying, "Who will shew us any good?" their language is, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; thou hast put gladness into our hearts, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased." Their joy on this occasion is far superior to the gladness which men feel in the time of vintage, or that of harvest; it is a joy bright and pure, as the regions whence it descends.

In the words, "Lift thou up the light of thy countenance, the Psalmist alludes to the lifting up of a banner: instead of the defence of an army with banners, he requests for his comfort and security amidst many enemies and dangers, the manifestation of the divine favour. As if he had said, "Men have their friends and confederates to afford them help in
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time of need; but, Lord, I desire no other comfort than thy favour; assure me of that and I shall be happy; give me but a consolatory sense of thy love, let me behold the brightness of thy reconciled face, and every threatening cloud will be dispelled. Then will my soul rejoice, with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

The joy which arises from a sense of God's favour, is indeed such as cannot be described. It is hearty and sincere; it is full, intimate and satisfying. It is so reviving to the fainting spirits of a poor sinner, who was before perhaps in a state of despondency, that it restores him, as it were, from death to life. Reader, if you have known this by your own experience, you will better understand the doctrine of our text, than others can by all that we can say upon it. A sense of God's displeasure is killing to him who puts such a value on the divine favour, as to look for all his felicity from it. But the sweet beams of his love, in the returning manifestations and assured tokens of it, give new life to the disconsolate soul. A child is deeply affected by the frowns of its earthly parent, but animated and cheered by his reconciled father's favourable smiles. It is even so with a child of grace. The favour of God gives him a new life of divine joy, elevated pleasure, and heart-felt satisfaction.

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Reader,

Reader, this is the life of heaven; it is feasting on the grapes of *Canaan*; it is living in *paradise*; it is feeding on the tree of life; it is leaning on the bosom of Jesus, having the kisses of his mouth, and tasting the joys of his salvation.

It must be owned, this is not a privilege to be enjoyed without interruption, in the present state. But it is the good pleasure of the God of all consolation, at some seasons to indulge his children with these foretastes of celestial felicity. When that eminent Scotch divine, Mr. *Robert Bruce*, was asked by his friends, in his languishing moments, how it was with him, he answered to this effect, "When I was young and in health, I was enabled to be diligent, and lived by faith in the Son of God; but now I am old and feeble, and it is his good pleasure to feed me with sensible comforts."

The Psalmist thus describes the felicity of gracious souls. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength; and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted."

The two last particulars relating to the divine favour, I apprehend, are principally intended in our text. The favour of God which bestows spiritual

tual life, and his favour as manifested to the soul, which animates it with a life of joy and comfort. From the context it appears, that *David* had the latter chiefly in view when he said, *In his favour is life.*

Should it be asked, "*But whose favour* is here intended? I answer, the favour of Jehovah, the fountain of life. The favour of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; for these three are one. The benediction prescribed for the priests to pronounce, under the former dispensation, is very remarkable, and may be thus paraphrased. "The Lord, the Father and fountain of blessings, the Preserver of his creatures, bless thee with spiritual blessings, give thee grace and keep thee in his fear. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, irradiate thy soul with beams of gospel light and love, make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Spirit of the Lord, the Comforter of his people, give thee an assured interest in the divine favour, and thus lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace! Even that peace which passeth all understanding, that it may keep thy heart and mind through Christ Jesus." See *Numb.* vi. 24, 25, 26. The New Testament benediction answers to that of the Old, and serves to explain it. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and

the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." The works of the blessed Three-One, are undivided. Hence creation is sometimes ascribed to the Son, sometimes redemption to the Father; and sanctification is sometimes represented as the work of the Father, and of the Son, as well as that of the Holy Ghost. He whose favour is here spoken of, is the one Jehovah.

It is necessary, however, to observe, before we close this chapter, that the favour of God is manifested to sinners only through Jesus, the Mediator of the covenant. It is only in him that God is reconciled to us. He is the great propitiation, by whom full atonement was made for our offences, through which God is pacified, and shews himself friendly and favourable to every one that believeth. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is not to be interpreted simply of the person of Christ, but of what he did and what he suffered in the capacity of a Mediator and Redeemer. Through him God is reconciled, and to the praise of the glory of his grace, he hath made us accepted in the Beloved; that is to say, in Jesus, the Son of his love. The streams of grace issue out to sinners since the fall, through the channel of redeeming blood. The beams of divine favour which quicken the dead sinner, and which enlighten, enliven, and

rejoice the hearts of saints, shine only in the face of Jesus Christ. Men are, as sinful, guilty and defiled, children of wrath, and deserving of destruction. The kindness which is shewn to them is free and undeserved. It is the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHAP. III.

In what Respects the Favour of God is Life.

HAVING made a few remarks concerning the favour of God, and that life which is in it, we now proceed to consider, in what particular respects his favour may be termed our life. And we apprehend it may justly be said to be the cause, the object, the rule, and the end of life to a good man.

1. The favour of the Most High is the cause of life. The apostle *James* tells us, "that every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Every natural endowment and accomplishment is derived from his favour, and much more that grace which makes us alive to him. This is the blessed product of divine and distinguishing love. In our natural

estate we are dead in trespasses and sins, and if we are brought out of that dreadful condition, into a state of spiritual life, it is not owing to any thing in ourselves, but to the favour of God. Thus the apostle *Paul* taught the *Ephesian* converts, "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ; by grace are ye saved." The important change so absolutely necessary to our present safety and final happiness, is effected by his power, in consequence of his abundant mercy. The comfort, peace and joy attendant on a new and spiritual life, are the fruits of divine favour. Grace and peace proceed from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to constitute us christians, and peace to keep our souls comfortable in that state. The Psalmist speaking of the felicity of God's children, makes use of these animating words, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them to drink of the river of thy pleasures; for with thee is the fountain of life." *Psal.* xxxvi. 8, 9. The term life, which is in the plural number in the *Hebrew* text, may denote, that God is the fountain of whatever may be denominated life; the life of nature, the life of grace, the life of comfort, of tranquillity, and of refined satisfaction and de-

delight. He in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore, is the Fountain of all. *In his favour is life.*

2. The favour of God is the object of life, as well as the cause of it. It is that to which a gracious soul looks for its felicity. The knowledge of God, as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, gives life to our hope, our peace and our joy. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. It is the work of faith to view the complete atonement of the all-glorious Redeemer, and to believe that in him the Father is well pleased.

When faith presents the Saviour's death,

And whispers, "This is thine,"

Sweetly my rising hours advance,

And peacefully decline.

While such my views, the radiant sun

Sheds a more sprightly ray,

Each object smiles, all nature charms,

I sing my cares away.

It is on this ground, that a just man is said to live by faith. All his present life of comfort consists in that which is apprehended by faith, the friendship and favour of God to him in Christ Jesus. He therefore says with the Psalmist, "When thou hidest thy

thy face, I am troubled. The world in vain tries to entertain me. All it can offer is like a jest to dying men, or like recreation to those in misery. On thy favour alone my tranquillity depends. Were I to be deprived of that, I should sigh for happiness in the midst of paradise. Thy loving-kindness is better than life. I have, in seasons of darkness, waited for the renewed manifestations of it, more than they that watch for the morning. The returns of the light of thy countenance are more welcome than the springing day-light, after the horrors of a gloomy and melancholy night; more welcome than ease to the sick, than cold water to the thirsty soul, or than rest to the weary and fatigued traveller."

When that gracious Being, with whom is the fountain of life, shews his reconciled face, the drooping soul revives, like the opening flowers at the rising of the sun. How heavenly, how divine are its comforts and joys! What indeed is the heaven we are waiting for, but the blessed, the uninterrupted vision of God? When the heirs of glory are admitted into his presence-chamber, and behold the King in his beauty, they will need nothing more to complete their happiness. "We now see through a glass darkly; but then face to face. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

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'Tis heav'n on earth to taste thy love,
To feast upon thy grace;
And that for which I hope above,
Is but to see thy face.

3. The favour of God may be considered, in some respects, as the rule of life. The will of God, as revealed in his holy law, is, properly speaking, the rule of our conduct, and serves as a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths. But does not a good man regulate his life and his actions with a conscientious regard to the divine approbation? When the apostle *Paul* says, "We labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him," he does not speak so directly of *personal* acceptance to eternal life; for of that he expresses the fullest satisfaction in the context, 2 *Cor.* v. 9. But it was his concern, and that of his fellow-saints, that all their labours, services, and sufferings, might find gracious acceptance with God through Christ; that so they might enjoy the supporting and consolatory manifestations of his favour in all. A truly good man would undertake nothing in which he might not warrantably hope for the favourable approbation of the Most High. We may observe this in the case of *Moses*, the man of God. His words are these, when pleading with the Almighty for the tokens of his favour; "Now therefore I pray thee,
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if I have found grace in thy fight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy fight." He dreaded the thought of taking one step forwards in the journey through the wilderness, without the presence and favourable smiles of that God in whom he trusted. Thus again he prays in that psalm which bears his name, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children; and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." It gives some men no concern, whether their Maker is pleased or displeased with their proceedings; but it is not so with those who put such a value on his favour as to account it their life. They have, in a measure, the same mind in them which was also in Christ Jesus, who said of his divine Father, "I do always those things which please him." This is what I mean by saying, that the favour of God is the rule of life. In connection with this I add,

4. The favour of God is the end of life. His pleasure is the due and proper end of the lives and actions of his creatures. "For thy pleasure they are, and were created." They are subordinate to him, as their end; for "of him, and through him, and to him are all things." All should tend to him,

as the lines in a circle to one common centre. The labours of man in his calling are for the support and comfort of his natural life; in like manner the holy exercises and duties in which a child of God is engaged, have for their end the enjoyment of his favour. He attends the solemnities of public devotion, that he may behold the beauty of the Lord, while he inquires in his temple; that he may see his power and his glory in the sanctuary. And why so? "Because," says he, "thy loving-kindness is better than life; it is better than my existence, the life which I live, for that would do me little good without it."

When the church, as represented in *Solomon's* divine pastoral, had lost the sweet sense of God's favour, through negligence and sloth, she took great pains in seeking the restoration of her former comforts. She quitted her bed of sloth, she rose and went about the city, in the streets and broad ways thereof; that is, she renewed her diligence in the public ordinances of divine worship; she inquired of the watchmen upon the walls of the city, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" And she rested not till he had restored unto her the joys of his salvation. What is it that a child of grace would not do, what is it that he would not endure, for the enjoyment of a sense of God's favour? It is more

more to him than all the world without it. In prayer, in hearing and reading the divine word, in meditation, in approaching to the Lord's table, still his cry is, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me."

Thus, the favour of God is the cause, the object, the rule, and the end of a good man's life.

III. The third general head of our discourse is, to consider to whom God's favour is life, and at what particular seasons it is so.

To the preservation of natural life, the providential favour of the great Governor of the universe, is necessary to every one, and necessary every hour, every moment. But I would particularly speak of his special favour, as more immediately intended in our text.

All the children of God most certainly know that his favour to them is life, and they know it is so at all times, particularly in religious duties, under trying dispensations, and even when they are in the full enjoyment of created comforts. But there are some special seasons when they will not only acknowledge this as a truth revealed in the scriptures, but when they will lie under a strong conviction and impression of it.

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This I believe is always the case, in a sinner's first conversion to God. This is the period when he begins to put a proper value on the divine favour. In his state of ignorance and stupidity, alas! he forgets God, and is awfully indifferent concerning either his anger or his love. But in conversion, the poor sinner, who was before at ease, thoughtless and secure, is enlightened, convicted, and pricked to the heart. His awakened soul begins to cry with *Peter's* hearers, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Or with the jailor at *Philippi*, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved? I have ruined and destroyed myself, and want a friendly guide, to set me in the right way. I know not what to do, or which way to look for relief. I have wandered from God, and from the way of peace till now, and am utterly at a loss what steps I ought to take. I am fully convinced, that if I proceed in my former course, I am utterly and everlastingly undone. Some other path I must tread, but how to find the way of safety I know not. Most earnestly do I desire to fly from the wrath to come, but alas! whither shall I fly? Ye ministers of Christ, ye servants of the Most High God, give me your counsel. Tell me, is there any hope for such a wretch as I am? I have gone astray like a lost sheep, upon the mountains of sin

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and error even till now. The terrors of an angry God set themselves in array against me ; O tell me how I shall escape them."

To such a sinner, the most distant prospect, the smallest degree of hope concerning God's favour, and reconciliation with him, would be as life from the dead. If the reader has felt the terrors of an awakened conscience, he will not be at a loss to know what we mean. He who has a just sense of God's awful displeasure against him, because of sin, can find no words expressive enough to set forth his value of the divine favour.

Now the God of all grace hath promised to guide bewildered souls into the way of life and peace. " I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go ; I will guide thee with mine eye. Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it. The way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein. For thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way which thou shouldest go. I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known ; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and

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not forsake them." The inquiring sinner should remember for his encouragement, that it is the office of the Saviour of men, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The convinced sinner sees the necessity of God's favour being manifested in turning his heart from sin to holiness. He sees the necessity of repentance, and is conscious of his own inability to produce it in himself. "Alas!" says he, "I can no more convert myself, than I could have given myself existence when I had none. I have no power to make my heart new, to make it pure and holy. I feel in myself nothing but disorder, perverseness, and rebellion. What shall I do? Merciful God! do thou thoroughly change and renew my soul. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned. Do all that for me, of thy abundant grace, which is necessary to my everlasting salvation. I am encouraged to ask this, because thou hast, of thy free favour, promised all that I want."

The poor sinner, in this case, is led to remember, for his relief, such declarations as the following. "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. I will give them an heart to know me, and they shall be

my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. I will put a new spirit within you, and will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh." Here God of his free favour, has graciously promised what the awakened soul fees to be absolutely necessary to its final safety.

Such a sinner wants a sense of interest in the divine Redeemer, and in all his saving benefits. He is fully convinced that there is no salvation for him but in Jesus. "How have I deceived myself," says he, "in placing my confidence in my own righteousness, which indeed is but as filthy rags! It is impossible that that should justify me which is so imperfect and impure as to deserve the abhorrence of my Maker and Sovereign. I now at last see my own nakedness and wretchedness. Behold, I am vile; I abhor myself, all I am, and all I have; nay, I justly deserve the abhorrence of that holy and righteous Being with whom I have to do. If I have not a righteousness better than my own, a righteousness answerable to the requisitions of the divine law, I am well assured, I cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. When I review my past life, and look into my depraved heart, I am confounded. God is holy, his law is pure, his justice is like a flaming fire against polluted sinners, such

as I am. In myself I have nothing to shelter or protect me, and should sink into despair, were it not for the glad tidings of gospel grace, in which a Saviour is revealed, who is become a surety for sinners, an advocate, a propitiatory sacrifice. O for a sense of interest in this precious, this Almighty Redeemer! What would I give, rather, what would I not give for this! Lord, shew me this favour, and what can I ask more!

“ I see that sinners are made partakers of the salvation of Jesus only by believing in him. But faith is the gift of God. How shall I believe in this divine Saviour? Alas! my unbelieving heart debars me from the consolation of the gospel. I sometimes think I will embrace Christ, but I seem to want arms to do it. I think I will come to him, but I seem to want feet, and cannot move towards him. I am convinced of my unbelief, and of the want of that faith which is of the operation of God. I see that without such a faith there can be no participation of pardon of sin, no enjoyment of peace with God, no hope of heaven. O that God would graciously work this faith in me, by his own almighty power! Lord, conquer and subdue my unbelieving heart, by the light and power of thy word, and the attractive beams of thy favour!”

In this case, the trembling sinner may find some encouragement from such declarations of the divine word as the following. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. A new heart will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you. Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

In a word, the returning sinner wants a discovery of his being received into the favour and friendship of God, through Jesus Christ. This would be worth more to him than all the world. He is conscious of his crimes, he is oppressed with loads of guilt, and almost overwhelmed with fearful and desponding apprehensions. He trembles to approach the awful Majesty of heaven, but standing afar off, he smites upon his breast, and like the Publican in the temple cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner. Satan, and my own misgiving heart would drive me from thee; but the sense of my necessity urges me on to seek that relief at thy hand which can be found no where else. Yet
how

how can such a wretch as I am, expect any token of mercy from thy offended Majesty ! I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; yet make me as one of thy hired servants ; let me but be taken into thy family, and I shall be happy, though I should occupy the meanest place, and stand in the lowest order. Lord, what shall I say unto thee ? Is there yet any mercy for my poor helpless and polluted soul ? Shall I ever obtain favour in thine eyes ? O look upon me, and be gracious unto me, for the sake of him who died the lost to save.

“ I will not despair, but endeavour to hope even against hope. Thou, O God, who art infinitely great, art also infinitely good and kind. Thy mercy is above the heavens. Thou hast had long patience with me, and kept me alive from going down to the pit of destruction, I would hope, with the compassionate design of bringing me to the knowledge of thy great salvation. For whom did Jesus, thy beloved Son, shed his blood ; for whom did he agonize and die, but for sinners ? Lord, I am a sinner, and though my crimes far exceed the crimes of many others, yet I find, in the days of his sojourning here below, he shewed mercy on great sinners ; they obtained forgiveness, as patterns of future grace to others. O Lord, look down

down upon me with an eye of pity; I am greatly perplexed between hopes and fears, and know not what to do. If I look at myself, I see nothing but grounds of discouragement, and of despair. * To me belongeth confusion of face; but to thee be long mercies and forgivenesses, through the death of thy dear Son. This is all my hope, the only ground of my expectation of pardon, of peace, and of reconciliation with thee.

“ And

* “So numerous are our offences, and so violent our provocations, that, were not the blessed God equally superior to us in goodness, as he is in power; and in pardoning mercy, as he is in wisdom; we could not have the least ground of hope. Among men, when a breach of private friendship has taken place, the aggressor, being conscious of the injury he has done, is commonly very backward to admit, that the aggrieved party has any benevolence for him. Thus it is with sinners, when their consciences are awakened, in regard to God. Extremely backward they are to admit, that *there is forgiveness with God*, for such aggravated crimes as theirs. To relieve the distressed soul, by obviating this very common and pressing difficulty, the Great Sovereign condescends tacitly to admit, that were he like us, neither pardoning nor sparing mercy would ever be exercised towards any of *Adam's* offspring. But, *he is God and not MAN*. His *thoughts*, relative to pardoning mercy, are not our thoughts; nor his *ways*, respecting that

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“ And is there indeed any hope for a wretch so miserable and forlorn as I am? The very possibility of obtaining favour with thee, alleviates my sorrows, and half removes the heavy load which oppresses my soul. Wilt thou be pacified towards me! Let me not deceive myself! Is not this too good news to be true! Have I any warrant from thee, O merciful God, for the hope I am cherishing? Yes! I this moment recollect what is written in the scriptures of truth; “ Let the wicked forsake his

important affair, like *our ways*. Offences, comparable to a debt of only *fifty pence*, are often with difficulty forgiven by us: while he, through the blood of atonement, freely obliterates a debt of *ten thousand talents*. Among mortals, it is an instance of love extremely rare, that any one should lay down his life, even for a *good man*, or a public benefactor; but God recommends his love towards us, in that, while we were yet *sinners*, and his enemies, he sent his own Son to die for us. Far from regulating the manifestations of his compassion according to the puny instances of human kindness; he not only blesses, but astonishes, by the displays of his matchless favour to sinners.— Yes, *God is Love*; and, therefore, he *delighteth in mercy*. What, then, could be more encouraging; or what, by necessary consequence, could more strongly authorise, a guilty, perishing wretch, to rely on the Lord Jesus, in whom this boundless mercy is manifested?” BOOTH'S Glad Tidings, pag. 26. 27.

his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more. I even I am he that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Whosoever believeth in Jesus shall receive remission of sins.

“ Lord, on the declarations of thy own mouth I venture my soul’s everlasting concerns. O help me so to believe what thou hast spoken, as that my fears and anxieties may be removed, and my soul be satisfied of its interest in thy favour which is life.”

Guilty and self-condemn’d I lie,
Before thy awful throne;
I know I have deserv’d to die,
Yet save me through thy Son.

In his dear name may I partake
The pardon I implore;
And, for thy sov’reign mercy’s sake,
My wand’ring feet restore.

Thy healing grace, O God, impart;
Relieve my trembling soul;
O let thy favour cheer my heart,
And all my fears controul.

CHAP. IV.

The Favour of God is Life to converted Persons in various Circumstances.

HAVING considered the text as applicable to the case of sinners at their first conversion, I now proceed to observe,

2. That the favour of God is life to returning backsliders. God's dear children are sometimes permitted to turn aside from the path of duty, to fall into open acts of sin, or into a course of secret remissness, negligence, and unwatchfulness. When that is the case, divine comforts are suspended, or, in the language of inspiration, the Lord *hides his face*, and leaves the soul in darkness, gloominess, and despondency. Through the power of indwelling sin, through the violence of Satan's temptations, or through the snares of the present evil world, they forsake the Fountain of living waters, leave their first love, and turn aside after lying vanities, till their hearts being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, they at length, perhaps, are overtaken with faults inconsistent with their christian character, or fall into dishonourable and scandalous practices. This is greatly to be lamented. But the good Shepherd restores his wandering sheep.

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He brings them to a just sense of the evil of their doings, and opens afresh the springs of godly sorrow. He says to them, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." That peace, which ariseth from a view of interest in Jesus, is lost. The grieved Spirit suspends his gracious influences, and the soul is filled with disquietude, distress and anguish.

When this is the case, the man is brought, in deep humiliation, to lament after an absent God, and to cry to him, with the Psalmist, "Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation." To the consolations of God I am now, alas! a stranger. Behold, for peace I have great bitterness! My case is sad and deplorable. When I first gave myself to the Lord, I promised constancy; but I have now forgotten and forsaken him and am quickly turned aside after vain things which cannot profit. Woe is me, ungrateful wretch that I am! My unkind dealing with God is unparalleled! Who ever turned aside unto folly as I have done? My guilty conscience now accuseth me, God frowns upon me, all my former sins are set in array against me, they

they stare me in the face. I am ready to question whether ever there were a saving change wrought in me. I think within myself, surely, none of God's children ever carried it towards him as I have done. Such a backslider in heart and life as I am, may justly expect to be filled with his own ways. I sometimes even fear that I have sinned beyond the reach of mercy; having been once enlightened, and after that fallen away, how is it possible that I should be renewed again unto repentance? May I not look rather for fiery indignation, than for a gracious acceptance into favour? Or if my sins have not reached to that degree, I am certain they have been attended with awful aggravations. I have sinned against light and love; I have been guilty of frequent and dreadful relapses; I have violated conscience, and grieved the Holy Spirit of God. These considerations wound me to the very heart, and cover my face with shame and blushing, so that I am not able to look up. Had I provoked a fellow-creature as I have provoked the Most High, what favour could I expect? But this thought relieves me, I have to do with God, and not man. I will study, I will plead his gracious and merciful declarations. He hath said, "My people are bent to backsliding from me; though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt
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him. How shall I give thee up, *Ephraim*? How shall I deliver thee, *Israel*? How shall I make thee as *Admah*? How shall I set thee as *Zeboim*? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy *Ephraim*; for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." *

The backsliding christian stands in great need of the manifestation of divine favour, in restoring life and vigour to his languishing graces. "I have," says he, "by my wanderings from God, not only lost the sweet sense of his favour, but I have impoverished my own soul, and brought it into a lean and languishing condition. My leanness, my leanness,

* "Depth of mercy! can there be
Mercy still reserv'd for me?
'Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?"

Jesus speaks, and pleads his blood!
He disarms the wrath of God;
Now my Father's bowels move:
Justice lingers into love.

Kind-

ness, woe is me! My faith staggers, my love is cold and feeble, my hope of heaven languishes, the springs of godly sorrow are dried up, or run very faintly. My heart is smitten and withered like grass. A cold winter has benumbed all the active powers of my soul, and nothing but the showers of grace, and the shining of the Sun of righteousness

Kindled his relentings are,
Me he now delights to spare;
Cries, "How shall I give thee up?"
Let the lifted thunder drop.

There for me the Saviour stands;
Shews his wounds, and spreads his hands!
God is love! I know, I feel!
Jesus says he loves me still.

If I rightly read thy heart,
If thou all compassion art,
Bow thine ear, in mercy bow!
Pardon, and accept me now.

Pity from thine eye let fall;
By a look my soul recal:
Now the stone to flesh convert;
Cast a look, and melt my heart.

Help me, help me to repent,
Let me now my fall relent;
Now my foul revolt deplore,
Weep, believe, and sin no more!"

ness can revive me. In the spring season, the Lord sends forth his Spirit, and renews the face of the earth; O that he would be graciously pleased to give me a happy spring season in my inner man; that he would renew and revive his work in my heart, and cause the fruits of righteousness to be produced in me, to his praise and glory! By my carelessness and sloth, I have been cast into a deep sleep. By the idleness of my hands, my soul suffers hunger, and is reduced to a starving condition. By the indulgence of sin, I have given wounds to my conscience, which nothing but his grace and favour can heal. Lord, return unto me, and have mercy upon me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee. Deal with me according to thy word; O be mindful of the gracious promises thou hast made to backsliding souls. I will endeavour to recollect some of them, and to plead them before thy throne of grace."

"After two days will he revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto *Israel*: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as *Lebanon*. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as *Lebanon*. They that

that dwell under his shadow shall return, they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of *Lebanon*."

"Lord, remember these great and precious promises in my behalf, and give me to experience their full accomplishment, which will be to thy poor servant as life from the dead."

The troubled backslider stands in need of the manifestation of divine favour, to restore peace and comfort to his soul. Let us suppose him in his retired moments, expressing the language of his heart in the following soliloquy. "I have, by my own folly and perverseness, lost that comfortable sense of God's favour which I once enjoyed. The Comforter that should relieve my soul, is withdrawn; O that I knew where I might find him! My soul is far off from peace; I forget prosperity; yea, for peace I have great bitterness. I mourn like a dove, and afflict myself, but in vain. I remember God, and am troubled, when I think of the past experience I have had of his comforting presence. These happy seasons are now enjoyed no longer. I say within myself, Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? It is long since I was favoured with the cheering light of his blessed countenance. There is a great and

fad strangeness between God and my soul. Alas!
what shall I do to recover what I have lost?

“ I must justify God, and condemn myself, even though he should banish me from his blessed presence for ever. But is there no ground of hope, that he will be gracious unto me? Will he not return to the soul that seeketh him? O what a blessed season would it be, might I again taste those heavenly consolations which I once enjoyed! O that it were with me as in months past, in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shone upon my head, and when, by his light, I walked through darkness!

“ Lord, I entreat thy favour with my whole heart; be merciful unto me, according to thy word. Hide not thy face from me, but restore unto me the joys of thy salvation. Grant me those heavenly smiles which cheer the hearts of thy dear children; deal graciously with me, as thou usest to deal with those that love thy name. O let me regain the sense of thy life-giving favour, for the sake of him who once cried, in agonies on the cross, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? If I am interested in the benefits of his redemption, if I am a child of thine, suffer me not to pine away in disconsolation, for want of the tokens of a Father's love. Receive a returning prodigal to thy embracing

bracing arms, and say unto my soul, *I am thy salvation.*"

Reader, if your case bears any resemblance to that which I have been describing, let me entreat you to ponder in your heart the following gracious declarations. "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit before me would be overwhelmed, and the living souls which I have made. Because of his iniquity, for a short time I was wroth; and I smote him, hiding my face in mine anger. And he departed, turning back in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways; and I will heal him; I will be his Guide: and I will restore comforts to him, and to his mourners.* For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."

To add no more, as to this point, the returning backslider stands in need of God's favour to secure him from future relapses. "Alas!" says he, "I have

* Dr. Lowth's translation of Isai. lvii. 16, 17, 18, 19.

have within me a heart bent to backslide, and prone to wander from God. And though I be now restored in great mercy, I shall certainly go astray again, unless I am upheld and preserved by the favour of the Keeper of Israel. After God has spoken peace, I am still in danger of turning again to folly. * Thou, O Lord, sayest unto me, *Go and sin no more*; but, alas! thou knowest my weakness and inconstancy. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Let thy favour surround me like a shield; cause thy face to shine, and I shall be saved. So will I not go back from thee; quicken me, and I will call upon thy name. Lord, put underneath me thine everlasting arm, and let thy right hand uphold me.

"I have many enemies without, and many within, and having had such mournful proofs of my own unspeakable weakness, and of the deceitfulness and treachery of my heart, I am jealous over my-

* "O to grace how great a debtor

Daily I'm constrain'd to be!

Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,

Bind my wand'ring heart to thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,

Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,

Seal it from thy courts above."

myself. O God, do thou establish, strengthen, and settle me; for my soul depends on thee alone. If thou art my defence, I shall not be greatly moved."

The promises of the divine word contain ample encouragement in this respect. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. Surely, he shall not be moved for ever. Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

3. Having considered the case of a sinner at his first conversion, and that of the returning backslider, I would now just briefly observe, that the child of God, under heavy and pressing affliction, stands in need of the divine favour, and values it as life. The afflictions of the righteous are so many, and so various, that my reader will not expect me to enumerate them all; but let them be of what kind, or in what form soever they may, there is great need of that support under them which God alone can give. Suppose the christian to be exercised with poverty and outward straits, which indeed is no uncommon case, a sense of the divine fa-

favour will greatly fortify his mind under the trials incident to such a state. It was once the saying of a gracious woman, "I have many times been richly fed by a suitable promise from God, when I have not had a morsel of meat in the house." Perhaps none have greater opportunities of knowing what it is to live by faith, than the godly poor, who have no stock in hand on which to depend. They may then peculiarly encourage themselves in the patronage of him who is the Lord of the universe, and say with the Psalmist, "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor." It is comfortable and relieving in such a case to recollect, that he hath said, "Rob not the poor, * because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate. For the Lord will plead their

* The pious Author might speak feelingly on this head. At one particular period, when a fine was laid upon him for no other offence than preaching the gospel to poor sinners, a fine which he was not able to pay, the officers seized on his furniture, and sold the most necessary utensils of his house, for a mere trifle, to any one who was unfeeling enough to purchase them. Mrs. *Heywood* requested it, as a favour, that one chest might be spared, as it was an ancient piece of family furniture; but this request was not regarded. The chest contained a small quantity of oat-meal, the scanty supply of the family.

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their cause." We use to say, "He is rich whom God loves," and it is a certain truth; for his favour is life. With the enjoyment of that, a little will go a great way. A good man not only desires to have the divine permission to enjoy the blessings of his providence, he would also taste his love in them, and along with them. "Lord," says he, "I have little, very little, which I can call my own in this world; but let me enjoy thy benediction, and thy favour with what I have, and I shall be fully satisfied. I am poor in this world, but let me be rich in faith, rich towards God, and I ask no more.

Suppose a good man to suffer in his name and character, the favour of God is his support. In such a case he may say, "I am denied the favour of men; they reproach, persecute, and oppress me; but be not thou, O Lord, a terror unto me; for thou art my only hope. Many of my fellow-creatures are against me, but let me enjoy thy friendship and favour, and then I may bid defiance to
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The officers took a bed-curtain, spread it on the floor, poured the meal upon it, and sold the chest. But God, by his favour, can sustain his children in trials like these, and even in sufferings still more severe. "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing that ye have in heaven, a more sure and enduring substance."

the world. Thy approbation more than counterbalances all that I suffer from the censures of men. Let persons of evil intentions report what they please concerning me, I desire to have a good report of the truth itself, and pray, that by the power of grace, I may be so helped to exercise myself, as to have a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards men, and then, the slanders of the world will not much disquiet me. If I am reproached for the sake of Christ, I ought to look upon it as a singular honour conferred upon me, as Moses counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect to the recompense of reward. I find the persecuted disciples of Jesus thus addressed, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you." His followers of old rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. My mind is composed to a divine calm, when I hear the Lord thus speaking in his word, "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who hath stretched forth

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forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor?

Are the children of God attended with diseases in their outward man? Nothing is so desirable to them as the favourable and consolatory smiles of their heavenly Father. When a good man is visited with sickness, and brought low by the power of disease, a variety of gloomy thoughts may becloud his mind, and add weight to the calamity under which he labours. The company, the converse, and the prayers of his religious friends may, in that case, afford him relief and encouragement. But, above all, the favour of God is life to him, and he esteems it as such. If it please the Lord, in infinite condescension, to visit him with the kind tokens of his love, to speak comfortably to him, by applying the promises of grace to his desponding heart, his darkness is turned into day, and his mourning into joy. It is a sovereign support under oppressive disorders, to find the Eternal God to be our refuge, to be upheld by his mighty arm, and to be strengthened by his cheering presence on the bed of languishing, when most we need his aid. When the Lord, according to

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his own merciful promise, makes all our bed in our sickness, we shall surely find ease in the midst of pain; and though the outward man seem to be perishing, the inward man will be renewed day by day.

Sometimes the people of God are afflicted in their relative capacity, and have much trouble on account of those who are bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh. Some of those who lie nearest their hearts, are oppressed with all the weight of violent attacks of sickness, or otherwise wear out a dying life under the languors of slow disease. A feeling heart cannot but be deeply affected in such cases. Others of their relations are sunk in all the depths of poverty and necessity; while others, if not poor, are profane, and have not the fear of God before their eyes. They are violent opposers of all that is good, and in them the words of our Redeemer are verified, "A man's enemies are they of his own house." In any of these cases the trial is heavy, and the christian is under the necessity of looking to the Lord for relief and comfort, as in the circumstance last mentioned, the prophet *Micah* resolved to do. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up

against her mother. Therefore I will look unto the Lord : I will wait for the God of my salvation : my God will hear me." As if he had said, "I am willing to lose the favour of my father, my mother, my wife, my brothers or sisters, if I may but enjoy the favour and friendship of the God of my life. From him I expect all my felicity."

Thus in all outward troubles, the favour of God is life. If it is inquired for what ends, and on what accounts it is so earnestly desired in these circumstances, much might be said in reply ; but I shall only observe, That a sense of God's favour sweetens the bitter potion of affliction, and lightens the burden of distress. Our heavenly Father most certainly corrects his children in love, in wisdom and in faithfulness. The end he has in view, is their profit, to make them partakers of his holiness, and to fit them for his heavenly kingdom. Affliction in itself is not joyous, but grievous, and if not alleviated by divine consolation, it would be still more so. Hence the afflicted christian sometimes says, " If I can but see that the heart of my heavenly Father is towards me, while his corrective hand is upon me, I shall be satisfied. If he is pleased to wound me in the tenderest part, I shall be contented, if I may but be assured that it is the wound of a friend. I will say, " It is

the Lord, let him do to me as seemeth good in his sight." But how can I bear the pressure of affliction without a sense of his favour!"

Let the afflicted christian consider well these divine declarations, and take the comfort of them. "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. We had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us, after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. By this shall the iniquity of *Jacob* be purged, and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin. For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

But besides the outward troubles which we have just mentioned, there are troubles of a more internal and spiritual kind, in respect to which, the favour of God is the best relief. Such, for instance, as arise from conscious guilt, and an apprehension

prehension of God's displeasure, because of sin. What can a guilty, condemned malefactor desire, so much as the Judge's favour? To one oppressed with the fear of God's anger, the only remedy is a discovery of his love.

Much inward trouble arises from a sense of the power and prevalence of the impurity and corruption of the heart. This makes the christian often cry out with the apostle *Paul*, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." A sense of the divine favour will lead us also to say with him, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The furious assaults of temptation are likewise very trying to the children of God, and assurance of his favour the best shield of defence, whereby they are enabled to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. The temptations of the grand adversary of souls, who goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, occasion much trouble to the pious man. He often says within himself, When shall the happy moment arrive, that God shall bruise *Satan* under my feet? O when shall it once be? When the enemy comes in like a flood, may the Spirit of the Lord lift up a standard against him. When the messenger of *Satan* comes to buffet me, may Jesus manifest his favour, and say

unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect through weakness." May he who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who knows how to succour them that are tempted; succour me, and surround me with his favour, like a shield. He knows how I am hurried and harassed, and sometimes even terrified by the roaring lion of the bottomless pit, may he strengthen me with strength in my soul, to fight the good fight of faith, and make me more than conqueror through his love.

CHAP. V.

The Favour of God is Life to dying Persons.

WE come now in the last place, under this head, to consider the words of our text with reference to dying persons. In that awful period to which we must all come, when we must pass through the valley of the shadow of death, meet the king of terrors, and be personally engaged in close conflict with that last enemy, we shall find, that an interest in the divine favour will be of the greatest importance. When, not only all created enjoyments must be given up, but life itself must be resigned,

signed, and our heart and flesh fail us, it will be of the greatest consequence to know, upon sure and certain grounds, that God is the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever. The good man will then, more than at any former period, be lead to say, *In his favour is life.*

The sweet experience of the divine favour will be above all things desirable, to satisfy the soul of its being in a state of safety. Perhaps the dying man hath been often doubting and disputing his interest in the Redeemer, and his title to the heavenly inheritance, while in health and vigour. If, under the power of a threatening distemper, and in the immediate prospects of his dissolution, these hesitations still remain, the bed of languishing will be very uneasy to him. He will probably express the anxieties of his mind in some such language as the following:

“Alas! what shall I do? I believe myself to be a dying man, and my soul, I fear, is in a dangerous state. I am passing into another world, and I know not where I shall land. I am going the way I shall never return; it is a great journey, and an awful one. O eternity, eternity, how solemn is the prospect! How near am I now either to heaven or hell, to eternal salvation, or everlasting damnation! My past sins and follies crowd afresh into my remembrance

membrance, and disquiet my conscience. I am doubtful of the truth of my repentance, because my heart is deceitful, the work is great, and attended with many difficulties. It is certain many do deceive themselves, and think they are something when they are nothing. I tremble, and am fore afraid, lest I should be found one of that number.

Shall I say, with the dying Emperor of *Rome*, "O my poor wandering, trembling, self-flattering soul, whither art thou going! Thou must no longer hold converse with men, nor enjoy thy former delights any more; ah, whither art thou going!" Or shall my case be like that of him who said, 'I have lived anxiously, and I die doubtingly!' Alas! I am afraid to part with life, and leave this world, not knowing whether God be my friend or my enemy. O what would I give for a satisfying testimony of my reconciliation with God! The assurance of his favour would be worth more to me than ten thousand worlds. Would he be graciously pleased to smile upon my soul, and lift up upon me the light of his countenance, I should not be afraid to die. Lord, thy favour is life to a dying man; grant me, O grant me some kind token of it; how else shall I pass this gloomy vale, and launch forth into the unknown abyss of eternity!

"Death

"Death is armed with a dreadful sting, and accompanied with many terrors. His sting I feel within me, his terrors shake my trembling soul, and pierce me through. I see his ghastly looks, I behold his horrid grin, and even feel his fangs fastening on my wasting flesh. My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. O merciful Redeemer, speak peace to my anxious bosom, say to my soul, 'I am thy salvation! I will deliver thee from going down to the pit, for I have redeemed thee, and given my own life a ransom for thee. I have tasted death for thee, I have encountered and subdued thy dreaded foe, to make thee more than conqueror over him.'

"Lord, help me to believe thy faithful word, and to take the comfort of it. Hast thou not said, 'O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction?' Hast thou not wrested the weapon out of the enemy's hand, and destroyed him that had the power of death, that thou mightest be the Deliverer of them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage? Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.—I see, I feel the thick gloom begin to break, and the light of divine favour beaming on my soul. The wounds of my dying Saviour are healing to my languishing heart. He takes the sting of death away, and gives
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me peace by the blood of his cross. My God through this is reconciled, I hear his pardoning voice, I feel his celestial consolations, and can now adopt the triumphant challenge, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me!" *

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* The following truly sublime effusions of Dr. YOUNG's evangelical muse, can never be too much admired.

To man the bleeding cross has promis'd all;
 The bleeding cross has sworn eternal grace.
 O what is this?—Survey the wond'rous cure,
 And at each step let higher wonder rise!
 Pardon for infinite offence! And pardon
 Through means that speak its value infinite!
 A pardon bought with blood! With blood divine!
 With blood divine of him I made my foe!
 Persisted to provoke! Though woo'd and aw'd;
 Blest and chastis'd, a flagrant rebel still!
 A rebel 'midst the thunders of his throne!
 Nor I alone! a rebel universe!
 My species up in arms! Not one exempt!
 Yet for the foulest of the foul he dies!

O'er

It is through the favour of God, that the soul immediately, on its dismissal from the body, is received into the mansions of glory. None but the objects of his love are admitted into his presence-chamber. It is true, we hear not his audible voice, as the penitent thief did, saying, *To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* Yet God speaks to us by his faithful word of promise, and on that ground the believer may say with the Psalmist, "God shall redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for he shall receive me." That is, He shall receive me

O'er guilt (how mountainous!) with out-stretch'd
arms

Stern justice and soft smiling love embrac'd,
Supporting in full majesty his throne,
When seem'd its majesty to need support,
Or that or man inevitably lost.

What but the fathomless of thought divine
Could labour such expedient from despair,
And rescue both? Both rescue! Both exalt!—
This, only this, subdues the fear of death.

Here is firm footing; here is solid rock;
This can support us; all is sea besides:
Sinks under us; bestorms and then devours.

Fond then we are, and justly fond of faith:
Believe, and look with triumph on the tomb.

Death's terror is the mountain faith removes,
That mountain-barrier between man and peace.

'Tis faith disarms destruction.

me, by his special favour, into a state of safety and happiness.

With what holy joy and transport may we look through death's dark vale, when we see the crown in our Redeemer's hands, ready to be placed on our heads! When we behold the blessed Jesus ready to put the victorious palm in our hands, and to fix our station among the triumphant throng, who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!

The dying saint may, with holy confidence, commit his soul to the hands of his Redeemer, and be persuaded of its safety there. He may say, "Lord, I am now taking my leave of this world, and of my dying body, receive my departing spirit; let angels be its convoy to *Abraham's* bosom. I leave my dust also to thy care, regardless of the insignificant ceremony of a pompous funeral. Let my unfettered soul, dismissed from the burden of the flesh, ascend to thee, my portion and my happiness; let it take the wings of a dove, let it fly away, and be at rest!"

Through the divine favour, the dying saint cherishes the sure and certain hope of a blessed and glorious resurrection at the last day. "The earthly house," says he, "of this tabernacle must be taken down;

down ; I must drop these clothes of flesh, as *Elijah* dropped his mantle when he ascended to the skies. This my feeble frame is dissolving ; it will presently be a lifeless mass, and must turn to dust and corruption. It will be the feast of worms, and mingle with the common mould. Yet in this state of dishonour, through the favour of God, my crumbling bones and wasting flesh shall be the care of Heaven. My body shall sleep in Jesus : it was redeemed by him, as well as my soul. And at the last great rising day, my scattered dust shall be gathered up again, and this vile body be fashioned like Christ's glorious body, according to his working, who is able to subdue all things unto himself.

“ I am fully assured by Him that cannot lie, that a happy re-union of body and soul shall take place, at the resurrection of the just. The soul descending with its triumphant Redeemer, shall meet the glorified body, newly risen from the tomb, and both be sweetly and happily united, to jar no more, nor ever more to know a separation. What a joyful union, what a happy marriage-day will this be, between the soul made perfect in purity, and the glorified body ! Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The body will be dignified with spirituality, with immortality, and with such ineffable glory, that it will shine like the sun in the

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kingdom of our Father. So wonderfully will this sickly, diseased, afflicted body of mine be changed, that it will neither need food, physic, nor sleep; but be as the angels of God, which are in heaven. Then shall I be seated on a throne, along with those blessed ones who, as our divine Redeemer tells us, shall judge the twelve tribes of *Israel*.

O happy, triumphant day! Day of refreshment from the presence of the Lord, after the labours and toils of this pilgrimage-state! The favour of the great Judge of all will then appear to be of infinite value. It is of little consequence who are my friends, or who my enemies in the present state; if Jesus Christ be my Friend, it is enough. He is now my Advocate with the Father, and will then be my Judge, to acquit me from every charge, through his own all-perfect righteousness. He will then own and honour the meanest of his followers, and look on them with a smile of approbation and favour, which will fill their souls with unspeakable joy. The meaning of our text will then be perfectly unfolded, and sweetly realized, *In his favour is life.*

Think, O pious reader, on that happy period when the once suffering, but now exalted Saviour will receive all his followers, with a hearty welcome, to the promised kingdom, prepared for them
from

from the foundation of the world. When he will say, with his own gracious lips, in the presence and hearing of assembled worlds, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, approach to me, come to my arms, come to my bosom. Come, and receive the kingdom of which you have so often heard, and for which you have so long hoped and waited with earnest expectation. Come, and enter into the full and everlasting possession of it. Come, and sit with me on my throne, even as I, your Leader, and the Captain of your salvation, have overcome all enemies, and am sat down with my Father on his throne. Welcome, my dear disciples, to your heavenly rest. Enter ye into the joy of your Lord. Ye have been faithful unto death, and I now give you, according to my promise, the crown of life. You have owned me on earth, and I now will own you in heaven. Ye shall be mine for ever. You chose and preferred my favour before the world, and now you shall possess it to your full satisfaction. You shall be placed on my right hand, while others, as you see, stand on my left. I manifested my favour to you, in some degree, while you sojourned in the wilderness below, but now I will do it more fully and completely. Come to my everlasting embrace, from which nothing can henceforth exclude you. To bring you to this enjoyment, I gave my life a

ransom for you. It was the great end for which I died. This was the joy which was set before me, when I endured the cross, and despised the shame, that I might bring many sons unto glory. This is the felicity which I promised to bestow upon you; and you see, I have not deceived you. These are the mansions I came before you to prepare. This is the kingdom which it is your Father's good pleasure to give you. It is not the reward of any meritorious actions which you have performed, but a fruit of that free favour of God which is your life, and by which you live for ever."

What can we suppose the ransomed of the Lord to say, in answer to this gracious proclamation from the eternal throne? Will they not, in the deepest self-abasement, and with raptures of astonishment and divine delight, ascribe all their salvation to God, and to the Lamb? Will they not cry with a loud voice, tuned to celestial harmony, "Blessing and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever!"

Let the reader who is born from above, and called, by divine grace, to glory and virtue, realize to himself, by the elevations of devout contemplation, the enjoyments, the honours, and the transports of that day, which will more than crown all his

his wishes, and far exceed his most enlarged expectations. Let him bear with patience and fortitude the trials and troubles of his wasting and transitory life, and reckon that the afflictions of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Let him look on death as a vanquished foe, and even bid him welcome when he approaches; for the favour of God is life to the dying believer. Let him say, as fortified by a well-grounded hope of interest in this, "I can now bid adieu to this vain world, and to all it contains; I can venture down into the peaceful grave, where my body shall sleep, as in a bed of spices, till the great rising day, while my soul ascends to *Abraham's* bosom. My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope; for I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me."

"When death appears before my fight
In all his dire array,
Unequal to the dreadful fight,
My courage dies away.

How shall I meet this potent foe,
Whose frown my soul alarms?
Dark horror sits upon his brow,
And vict'ry waits his arms.

But see my glorious Leader nigh!
My Lord, my Saviour lives;
Before him all death's terrors fly;
My fainting heart revives.

Lord, let thy love be my defence,
My shield for ever near;
Then faith shall triumph over sense,
And never yield to fear.

Then shall I meet the dreadful hour,
With fortitude divine;
Sustain'd by thy almighty pow'r,
The conquest must be mine.

What though subdu'd this body lies,
Slain in the mortal strife;
My spirit shall unconquer'd rise
To a diviner life.

Lord, I commit my soul to thee;
Accept the sacred trust,
Receive this nobler part of me,
And watch my sleeping dust:

Till that illustrious morning come,
When all thy saints shall rise,
And, cloth'd in full, immortal bloom,
Attend thee in the skies,

When

When thy triumphant armies sing
The honours of thy name,
And heav'n's eternal arches ring
With "Glory to the Lamb!"

Then may I join the raptur'd lays,
And, with the blissful throng,
Resound, "Salvation, pow'r, and praise,"
In an eternal song."

CHAP. VI.

*What that Life is which proceeds from the Favour
of God.*

BEFORE we dismiss the doctrinal part of our subject, we shall briefly consider, What that life is, which the favour of God confers. In the explication of the terms of our text, we hinted, that natural life, spiritual life, and the life of comfort and happiness are all dependent on the divine favour. To amplify the subject a little more, we would proceed to say, That a life of justification originates in the same glorious cause. A state of justification may be emphatically called a state of life. A man actually condemned, is legally dead. A full pardon gives him, in a law sense, a new life.

life: So in a spiritual respect, a just, or justified person is said to live, and to live by faith.

The justification of a sinner before God is not by any works of his own ; but only through the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to him, and received by faith. It is one of the most glorious truths revealed in the scriptures, and that which distinguishes the gospel system from every other system of religion, that our divine Redeemer should become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth ; that he who knew no sin, should be made sin for us, should bear our sins in his own body on the tree, put them away by the sacrifice of himself, to the end that we, by his obedience unto death, might be made righteous.

On this divine plan, the merit of human works is cut off, and all boasting in ourselves entirely and for ever excluded. The justification of a sinner in the sight of his Maker and his Judge, is not of debt but of grace, or free favour. " We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." The God of all grace, according to his abundant mercy, provided, appointed, and accepted the wonderful expedient, so needful for poor, ruined, helpless sinners, and so honourable to all his own attributes. " To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

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But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

The whole is the contrivance of infinite wisdom, and unbounded love. The poor sinner, who cannot pay one mite, in order to satisfy divine justice for his multiplied offences, is set clear of every charge, and of all condemnation, upon his accepting of Christ by faith, as the Lord our righteousness. The faith itself, by which he receives him, is the free gift of God. Here is grace upon grace, or favour upon favour, all entirely and absolutely free. A poor arrested debtor accounts it a great favour, if a friend will become surety for him, and still greater, if he will discharge all his debts, and set him perfectly free. Jesus Christ, our great Surety, has done this for us, miserable offenders; so that whoever believeth in him is justified from all things, and everlastingly accepted in the sight of God. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again. For as he died for our sins, he rose again for our justification. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, and, as a proof of their being so, walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." What astonishing fa-

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your is this! Favour, in which is our life! What an admirable contrivance of rich and free grace! * A contrivance by which at once sin is exposed in all its hatefulness, condemned and punished, the justice of God is fully satisfied, the violations of his law more than repaired, its precepts infinitely honoured, and

* “ There is nothing in the law’s sacred injunctions which Christ, as our Surety, did not perform, nothing in its awful threatenings which he did not sustain. He fulfilled all its precepts, by an unspotted purity of heart, and the most perfect integrity of life. He exhausted its whole curse when he hung upon the cross, abandoned by the Father, and a bleeding victim for the sins of men. This obedience brings higher honour to the divine law, than it could have received from the uninterrupted duty of *Adam*, and all his posterity, in all their generations.

May the blessed Spirit enable you to believe, that your sins are expiated through the death of Jesus Christ, that a righteousness is given you, by which you may have free and welcome access to God, the merit of which you may plead, for obtaining all the blessings of time and eternity! Will this alienate your affections from your almighty Benefactor? Will this irritate evil concupiscence, or send you to carnal gratifications in quest of happiness? Quite the reverse. When this faith is wrought in your heart, nothing will be so powerful to produce holy love, and willing obedience; to exalt your desires, and enable you to overcome the world. Mul-

and the poor sinner, guilty, condemned, and utterly helpless in himself, accepted as righteous before the divine throne, and as completely justified as if he had never transgressed. This is that wonderful

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Multitudes of poor sinners are held fast in the fatal snares of vice, by their ignorance of this sweet, consolatory truth. They find themselves deeply obnoxious to divine justice, and feel themselves strongly bound by the chains of sensuality. They think it is impossible to clear the enormous score of their guilt, impossible to deliver themselves from the confirmed dominion of sin. Therefore, like desperate debtors, they stifle every serious thought, lest a consciousness of their long arrears, and a prospect of the dreadful reckoning, should torment them before the time.

But if they were informed, that the infinitely merciful Son of God has undertaken to redeem such undone and helpless sinners; that he has thoroughly expiated the most horrid transgressions, and procured, even for ungodly wretches, all the needful supplies of strengthening grace; that, instead of being prohibited, they are *invited* to partake, *freely* to partake of these unspeakable blessings;—were they acquainted with these glad tidings of the gospel, surely they would burst their chains, and spring to liberty. These truths, if once revealed in their hearts, would, of all considerations, be most effectual to make them free. The gracious Redeemer himself has said, *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* Hervey's Theron and Aspasio, Dial. xiv.

expedient which excites the attention and admiration of angelic minds. They stoop down to contemplate the mystery divine, and desire to look into it. This is that expedient in which grace reigns, in which it triumphs in all its sovereignty, and in all its glory, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, unto eternal life.

The sanctification of our natures, closely connected with what we have just mentioned, by which we are enabled to live to God, is also the effect of divine favour. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." He lives in me by his Holy Spirit, forming me after his image, and producing in me those gracious habits, spiritual dispositions, and holy acts, which are pleasing in his sight. The issue of these is new and evangelical obedience to his will.

Sanctification is the production of grace. Every christian, as such, is the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good works; he may therefore say, in his measure, with the apostle PAUL, "By the grace of God I am what I am." And as it is God's grace which produces in us every holy disposition, so it is the same grace which quickens and excites these dispositions from time to time, into spiritual action. It is in this light that we are to understand the words of our divine Saviour, when he says, "Without me ye can do nothing."

thing." Perfectly conformable to this, his inspired apostle has told us, that it is God which worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. The holy principle in the heart, which is as a well of water springing up to everlasting life, is given by him, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell.

It is the very God of peace who sanctifies his children wholly, and who fills them with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to his own glory and praise. Progress in sanctification, power to perform religious duties aright, and fresh assistances for new encounters and undertakings, are from him. Let none say that our system is unfriendly to holiness, because it excludes human works from having any place in a sinner's justification; for holiness of heart and life is inseparable from the blessing of free justification by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We allow holiness to have the place which God has assigned it in his word, though we dare not substitute it in the room of the Redeemer's obedience unto death.

It is a certain truth, that where Christ is a Saviour he will be a Sovereign. He is the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey him. His benefits and his person cannot be divided; the virtue of his death is connected with its value. Newness

of heart and of life is as necessary in its place as freedom from wrath and condemnation. Christ is made of God unto us sanctification as well as righteousness, and every sincere believer is created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. The liberated soul, whom the Captain of salvation hath made free from the power of sin, is thankful for deliverance from his former fetters, as well as for the discharge of his enormous debts. An acquittal in open court would not render a prisoner happy, unless he were also released from bondage. In like manner, our salvation by Jesus would not be complete, unless we were delivered from the power, as well as from the guilt of sin. Strength to serve God, and to do his will from the heart, is a desirable favour, as well as deliverance from condemnation and wrath. The believer enjoys both. Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.

The necessary comforts and supports of life, afforded to us in a new-covenant way, are blessings flowing from God's favour. Man lives not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord. He blesteth our bread and our water, and makes our external enjoyments conducive to the support and the comfort

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of our lives. It is the christian's happiness to receive all the blessings of providence as blessings ensured to him by that everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure. As such they are expressions of God's favour. This seems to be the meaning of the apostle's words, when he says concerning the temporal necessities of the saints, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." There are riches in glory, or glorious riches in Christ Jesus, according to which every blessing is bestowed. All your wants of soul and body are hence supplied. Let the believer dwell, in his thoughts, on this precious portion of scripture, and by an active faith feed on the marrow and fatness of it.

The word of God abounds with expressions to this purpose, that there is no want to them that fear him; that he shall give them the desire of their heart; that they shall inherit the earth; that he will withhold no good thing from them; that, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto them; that is, not as common mercies, but as blessings ensured by promise, and as tokens of special favour. Thus the Lord spake concerning his ancient people, by the prophet *Jeremiah*, "I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land

assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul." Here are temporal blessings accompanied with special favour.

Sometimes the Lord bestows gifts in displeasure; as when he fed the *Israelites* with quails in the wilderness. Awful is that divine declaration to a disobedient and gain-saying people, "Thus saith the Lord, I will curse your blessings, yea, I have cursed them already." But a child of God partakes of the bounties of his hand in mercy, and as tokens and testimonies of special favour. This makes them doubly precious and valuable.

How sweet our daily comforts prove,
When they are season'd with his love!

Xenophon, speaking of the kindness of *Cyrus* to his friends, relates, that he gave a cup of gold to *Artabazus*, and a salute to *Chryfantas*; the former complained that he had been treated with less kindness than his friend, because the salute of *Cyrus* was a token of greater favour to *Chryfantas*, than the golden cup was to him. It is certain, that there is more value in the tokens of favour which the Almighty grants to his poor, despised, and afflicted people, than there is in all the treasures of the rich and the great. Whatever the portion of his children be here as to quantity, it is, in quality, like

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Benjamin's mess, five times larger than that of others; because it is accompanied with the favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord.

But if the gifts of providence are tokens of the divine favour, then what may be said of the life of felicity and glory in heaven? Eternal life is the gift of God, and a gift of special favour and love. "I give unto them," saith the Lord of glory, "eternal life, and they shall never perish." The Father freely gave his beloved Son; the Son as freely gave himself for us. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." The divine gift is free to us, though it was not so to our Redeemer. The manner in which it is conferred on us, and conveyed to us, is wonderful; but, so far from lessening, it greatly enhances the favour, that so much must be done, and so much endured by the Son of God, in order to bring our souls to heaven. Well may we write the word FAVOUR in capital letters on all the steps whereby we are advanced to glory, and upon every link of that golden chain which raises us from earth to heaven, from the miserable abyfs of our natural state, to the paradise of God's immediate presence.

The Psalmist saith, in the language of lively hope "Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." And Jesus assures

his followers, that they shall possess the promised inheritance as the fruit of God's good pleasure, notwithstanding the discouragements under which they often labour. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Reader, if ever you come to the possession of that kingdom, you must be carried thither in the bosom of God's favour. No man that enters the pearly gates of the celestial city, can say, "I have obtained this felicity by my own deservings." The heavenly inheritance is bequeathed by favour, not obtained by merit. A boasting, self-sufficient *Romish* priest once said, "I will not accept of heaven *gratis*." The glorified inhabitants of that celestial place speak another language; they all unite in casting down their crowns before the throne, debasing themselves to the lowest degree, and crying, "Salvation to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

We shall close this chapter by considering, in a few words, Why christians esteem God's favour to be their life.

They are induced to do this, because they have that illumination of mind which leads them to see the difference between the enjoyment of God, and all other enjoyments whatever. There is such infinite excellency in the Fountain of all felicity, and
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such vanity and emptiness in the creature, that they, whose minds are in any degree enlightened, must know what choice to make. God is the chief good; other objects, in comparison with him, are empty, deceitful and vain. Or, to speak more properly, vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit. A child of God is, through grace, enabled to judge of things aright, and as they are in their own nature.

The apostle *Paul* prayed for the *Philippians*, that their love might abound more and more in all knowledge, and in all judgment, that they might discern the things which differ, so as to approve those which are excellent. Enlightened souls turn away with disgust from a deluding world, and look for all their felicity in that all-gracious Being whose favour they esteem as life; saying with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee." There is an energy in these words, which though the good man feels, the commentator cannot express. The gracious soul seems to speak in the person, and with the affection of a spouse, declaring, that not only earth, but heaven itself would be comfortless and unsatisfactory, without the presence of her beloved Redeemer, the God of her salvation.

A true christian has not only his understanding enlightened, but his will and affections sanctified.

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A man in a state of nature savoureth not the things which are above; but he that in scripture is denominated a new creature, is possessed of a new heart. He is born of God, and actuated by a noble and evangelical principle, by which he is disposed to make a wise and happy choice. The holy angels in heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect, look with indifference on all that which is most coveted and desired by the men of this world. They take little notice of earthly treasures, mitres, sceptres, crowns or kingdoms. One smile of God's face is of more value, in their estimation, than all the possessions and honours which the world can afford. The disposition of a true saint bears some faint resemblance to the elevation of celestial beings, so far as to enable him to esteem the divine favour his life, and to look for all his felicity from it. "They who are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." That is to say, those who are under the guidance, influence, and dominion of the Holy Ghost, and of the gracious principles which he produced in them, in their regeneration, mind spiritual things; they chuse, they pursue, and they delight in those objects which are of a divine and heavenly nature, as being agreeable to their renewed and sanctified inclinations, and according

According to the dictates of the Spirit of God. Reader, you are happy if you are conscious that this is your case, and your daily experience.

The true christian hath known something of the bitterness of sin, and of God's displeasure against it, and hath found the impossibility of obtaining rest to his soul any where but in a reconciled God, through Jesus Christ. * A malefactor at the bar may make many efforts to put off his grief; but nothing will give full relief to his mind but his prince's favour, manifested in a sealed pardon. Thus it is with a converted sinner, who has felt the terrors of a broken law, and been alarmed with apprehensions of the divine displeasure. Nothing can compose his mind, and quiet his anxious bosom, but the favour and friendship of that almighty Being whom he has grievously offended. To talk to him of the honours, riches and pleasures of this world, is like singing songs to one who is of a heavy heart. They relieve him not, but rather add weight to his burden, and increase his sadness. The language of the gracious man is, My soul thirsteth for God, the
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- * In vain the trembling conscience seeks
Some solid ground to rest upon;
With long despair the spirit breaks,
Till we apply to Christ alone.

living God. As the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." *

Finally, the true christian is enabled to view things by an eye of faith, and as such, is directed and determined what to chuse, and to pursue. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Thus, "by faith, *Moses*, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of *Pharaoh's* daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of *Egypt*: for he had respect to the recompence of the reward." The eye of faith overlooks all the glory of this world, and lays its honour in the dust. It draws a veil over the world's deceitful charms, and contemplates heavenly objects in their native lustre and beauty.

* Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Lord, support and comfort me!

All my trust on thee is stay'd,
All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing.

beauty. Faith realizes the things of the kingdom of God, and as such, is the victory which overcometh the world. It looks within the veil, takes the dimensions of the heavenly inheritance, surveys the celestial country, and forms a proper estimate both of things below, and things above, and engages and directs the soul to make a proper valuation of the one and of the other. A christian's life is a life of faith. He walks by faith, and not by sight and sense. Faith quickly discerns how little the objects of sense can contribute to solid happiness, and that the favour of God alone is the life of the soul. *In his favour is life.*

Vain earthly delights
No more I desire,
To infinite heights
My wishes aspire;
Lord, thou art my treasure,
My portion and choice;
And in thy good pleasure
My soul shall rejoice.

The world I resign,
And all it can give;
Lord, if I am thine,
Securely I live.

If

If thou art my Saviour,
 In thee I have all ;
 I'm blest in thy favour,
 Whate'er me befall.

In all my distress
 Thy mercy is near,
 My griefs to redress,
 And vanquish my fear ;
 For thou art omniscient
 Each danger to spy ;
 And God all-sufficient,
 My needs to supply.

When earth can afford
 No comfort or ease,
 I find in thy word
 Celestial peace :
 If all the creation
 Upon me should frown,
 Thy glorious salvation
 My wishes will crown.

Having gone through the doctrinal part of our subject, we shall next endeavour to apply what has been advanced.

CHAP. VII.

The Subject applied by Way of Information.

IF the reader is pleased to review the foregoing pages, he will find, that by the favour of God we understand, his kindness in a way of common providence, the peculiar instances of his goodness, the distinguishing acts of his grace, and the comfortable enjoyment of his special love. This is denominated life, as it is the cause, the object, the regulation, and the end of a pious man's life. We have considered the subject with respect to a sinner's first conversion, his being led into the way of peace, and brought into a state of acceptance with God through Jesus Christ. We have observed, that divine favour restores us from a backsliding state, supports us under every kind of affliction, and fortifies our minds in the near approach of death. We have considered, that from the favour of God proceeds a life of justification, of sanctification, of perseverance in grace and holiness, and of glorification after death. We have finally remarked the reasons why God's children put such a value upon his favour as to account it *life*. Their minds are divinely illuminated, their wills and affections are sanctified, they have tasted that the Lord is gra-

cious, and their estimation of things is not after the flesh, but by faith. If the reader will favour us with his serious attention, we shall now endeavour to apply what has been advanced. And that, first, by way of information.

It appears from what has been said on this important subject, that *life* is a rich mercy. It must be so, since it is the production of God's favour. *In his favour is life.* It is that good thing by which the Psalmist illustrates and exemplifies the favour of God. He does not say, In his favour are to be enjoyed wisdom, riches, health and kind relations; but, In his favour is life. Though those are great mercies, yet life is greater. Natural life is a fundamental blessing. If that is suspended, or taken away, all the comforts of life cease. Nature desires a perpetuation of its being, and shudders at the thought of its dissolution. Satan, the father of lies, can sometimes speak truth, as he did when he said, "Skin for skin, and all that a man hath will he give for his life." It is owing to the favour of God that we have any being, though we are attended with many afflictions, and rank with the lowest of his reasonable creatures. Existence is what the Sovereign of the universe did not owe us. "I will sing unto God," said *David*, "as long as I live; I will sing praise unto my God, while I have

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my being." Because we have life or being from him, and are dependent on him for the support and continuance of it.

The outward comforts of life are also the fruits of God's favour. As it is of his mercy that we are not consumed for our unnumbered offences against him, it is owing to the same benignity that his mercies are renewed to us every morning, yea, every moment. His favour is the life of our enjoyments, the mercy of our lives. On his goodness our daily comforts depend. He not only redeemeth our life from destruction, but he crowneth us with loving-kindness and tender mercies. When we receive a benefit from a fellow-creature, we do not fix our attention on the hand that bestows it, and own our obligation to that; it is the kind disposition of our benefactor which affects us, and excites our gratitude. In like manner, the blessings of providence are to be received with thanksgiving, because they are the fruits of divine favour. That is the source of all our supplies, since by our offences against God we have forfeited every enjoyment. Let us then pay our constant acknowledgments to him for them, and say with the grateful patriarch, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant."

We must still recollect the distinction already observed, between God's special favour to his own children, and that which is common to all men. As to the latter, it is extended to the good and the bad, the just and the unjust. "No man knoweth either love or hatred, by all that is before him. All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: As is the good, so is the finner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath." God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. Even his avowed enemies often partake largely of his bounty.

But let it be observed, that God's peculiar favour is infinitely better than all outward and worldly enjoyments. There is so great a difference between these, that they will not bear a comparison.

Among the ancient heathen philosophers there were long disputations about the chief good of man. They bewildered themselves in endless inquiries, and were unable, after all their researches, to bring the matter to any satisfactory conclusion. But divine revelation determines the point at once. The chief good of man consists in the enjoyment of the divine favour. That alone constitutes his complete felicity. "There be many," says the Psalmist,

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“that say, Who will shew us any good? But, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.” Let us be assured of thy favour, and we ask no more. Let others make the best of what this world can afford;

Yea, let them stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore;
Grant us the visits of thy face,
And we desire no more.

The favour of God is the spring and fountain of all favours; and without dispute, the original cause hath more in it than the effects. His favour is a full and plentiful inheritance, for he is the fountain of living waters, while created comforts are but broken cisterns, which can hold no water.

His favour alone can satisfy the boundless cravings of a rational and immortal soul. Created comforts cannot do it. This only gives solid peace and quietness to the otherwise restless mind, and affords full contentment to all its enlarged wishes. The Author of our being formed our souls for himself, and they will never be at rest till they centre in him. “Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness; I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of *David*.”

The soul of man is spiritual in its nature, and therefore carnal and corporeal objects cannot be a suitable good for it. He is denominated a foolish man, who would say to his soul, "Soul take thine ease,—thou hast goods laid up for many years." What were these goods to his soul? There is no proportion between earthly goods and the cravings of the soul. But the favour of God, the enjoyment of infinite excellence, is a suitable good for it. The sprinkling of the dew moistens the surface only of the grass and herbs of the field, but when God sends a plentiful rain to water his inheritance, the soil itself is saturated, and the parched ground drinks its fill, and is satisfied. It is thus with the soul when it is filled, as the apostle speaks, with all the fulness of God. A spiritual good alone suits the nature of spiritual faculties and capacities.

The favour of God is to be desired for itself, as the ultimate object of our wishes. Created enjoyments are only desirable for inferior ends. Bread is desirable to satisfy hunger, and physic for the recovery of health; but God is to be desired for what he is in himself, and the productions of his hand only in subordination to him. All created things must be referred to their great Original, as the efficient cause and end of them. They may be considered as helps to a man in his journey, but
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they are not the end to which his views should be directed.

The favour of God is an independent good. The soul that enjoys it has enough to constitute its happiness in the absence of created objects. The felicity of the saints in heaven is not dependent on any thing external. The vision and enjoyment of God constitute all their bliss. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. He himself shall be with them, and be their God. This is the sum of their happiness. And thus it is, in an inferior degree, with holy souls on earth.

The favour of God is an infinite good. It can at once fill and satisfy millions and millions of the spirits of good men made perfect in heaven, as well as saints on earth. The natural sun gives light only to one hemisphere at a time, but the light of God's countenance, in a glorious manner, diffuses celestial felicity through all the regions of paradise at the same period. All the blessed angels and saints above enjoy the full beams of God's favour, and the more distant rays of it gladden many hearts upon earth. That which fills and satisfies both heaven and earth at once, though in different proportions, must needs be infinite.

The favour of God is unmixed, pure, and perfect, like the pure river of the water of life, clear
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as crystal. The full enjoyment of it gives light and no darkness, health and no sickness, life and no death, blessing and no curse, fulness of joy, and no sorrow. Even in this lower world, so far as the light of God's countenance shines upon the souls of his children, and is not intercepted with the fogs and mists of ignorance, fears and guilt, there is no defect in it. In worldly enjoyments there are mixtures of vexation of spirit, and therefore they are but vanity. But the favour of God is, as considered in itself, an unmixed and perfect good.

The favour of God is likewise very powerful. It can at once cure the soul of all its complaints. It can scatter the clouds of darkness, remove all doubts and fears, and drive away sad and melancholy thoughts in a moment. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." No comforts have such efficacy as God's comforts. Carnal mirth is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. But the beamings of God's favour can raise the soul from the lowest state of dejection and disconsolation. His favour can turn our darkness into day, our distraction into perfect peace, our storm into a calm, our mourning into joy, and our
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very hell into heaven. "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. Thou hast turned for me my mourning into joy, thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."

The favour of God is a sure and certain good. This cannot be said of any earthly enjoyment. They are all uncertain to the possessor. A proud self-sufficient man once made his boast, that there were three things which he could not lose, his learning, his riches, and the king's favour. But he proved to be deceived in this his vain confidence. He lost all the three idols of his heart. His prince's favour was capriciously withdrawn, his wealth was taken from him, and to complete the measure of his calamity; he lost his reason, and consequently his learning. But the favour of God is constant, permanent, and everlasting. The grace it bestows is, at length, perfected in glory. The path of the just is like a shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.

Reader, the hints which I have here given you are but short, but I hope you will think them worthy of your serious attention. Review them, weigh them well, and may almighty grace determine your heart to look for all your felicity from that merciful and gracious Being whose favour is life!

When fancy spreads her boldest wings,
And wanders unconfin'd,
Amid th' unbounded scene of things
Which entertain the mind :

In vain I trace creation o'er,
In search of sacred rest ;
The whole creation is too poor,
Too mean, to make me blest.

In vain would this low world employ
Each flattering specious wile ;
There's nought can yield substantial joy
But my Creator's smile.

Let earth and all her charms depart,
Unworthy of the mind ;
In God alone this restless heart
An equal good can find.

Great Spring of all felicity,
To whom my wishes tend,
Do not these wishes rise from thee,
And in thy favour end ?

Thy favour, Lord, is all I want,
Here would my spirit rest ;
O seal the rich, the boundless grant,
And make me fully blest !

CHAP. VIII.

The Subject farther improved, by Way of Conviction.

IF the favour of God be the life of his children, they must be in an unhappy condition who have no reason to believe themselves in a state of acceptance with him. To live and die under the displeasure of the Most High, is miserable indeed. It had been better for such, as our Lord said concerning *Judas*, if they had never been born. O sinners, how can you live, how dare you die in such a state? If the great Judge of the world disown you at last, who do you think will take pity on you? By what strange expedient do you fortify your minds against the terrors of that awful day? Can you eat, drink, sleep, and pursue your diversions, while you are yet in a state of enmity with God?

Perhaps you mind not these things, but put off all thought of the affairs of your souls, and of what will become of you hereafter. This is astonishing indeed, since you are not assured of one hour's longer continuance in this world. But what will you do in the day of visitation, when the king of terrors makes his approach? Can you hope for an exemption from the awful stroke of his killing hand? Or

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can you expect a reprieve when he is commissioned to make you his prey? You surely cannot suppose that you shall die like a brute, and know neither happiness nor misery when life is gone. You cannot be so foolish as to imagine, that if there be a state of future happiness, you can enter into it without reconciliation with God. You cannot think of possessing it in a way directly contrary to his word and will. Life is in God's favour. I may say to him who is the enemy of the Almighty, as it was said to *Abimelech*, "Thou art but a dead man."

If you are in this state you have no spiritual life, but are dead in trespasses and sins. Though you have a name to live, you are still dead. A dead carcase may be dressed and adorned in a splendid manner, but its ornaments will not give it life. He who is not in a state of friendship with God, whatever gifts or talents he may possess, or whatever duties he may perform, is still in a state of death.

He is likewise under the sentence of condemnation. The law passes this sentence upon him; the word of God declares him to be condemned already. By sin he has forfeited all right even to the comforts of this life, though it pleases the Father of mercies to bestow them upon him, yet he is but in the state of the condemned. There is no

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moment of his life in which he is not liable to the execution of that awful sentence which the law passes upon him. His life hangs in doubt, and depends on the mercy of his offended Judge. The almighty Sovereign has declared, that the workers of iniquity shall be cut off, that he is angry with the wicked every day; if they turn not he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow and made it ready; he hath prepared for them the instruments of death.

How then, O sinner, can you be thoughtless and secure, how can you rest quietly under the weight of all your crimes, and in so much danger? You know not that you shall live another day, another hour. Death may meet you at your board, in your bed, in the field, or on the high way, and at once remove you from this world to another. You may be of the number of those who perish at the rebuke of his countenance. When he sends the ghastly messenger to summon you away, you cannot evade the call.

But what is still more awful, if you die in a state of impenitence, you will immediately enter on the bitter pangs of eternal death. O consider what it will be to have your souls everlastingly banished from the favourable presence of God, and shut up in darkness and perpetual despair. Can you read such awakening declarations as the following, with-

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out trembling? "He shall take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power!" Though you can now live contented without the enjoyment of God's favour, your eyes will then be opened to see the infinite value of it.

The withdrawals of the light of God's countenance for a time, have filled holy souls in this world with deep distress and sorrow. What then will it be to lie exposed to his awful indignation for ever? Your vain and delusive hopes, O sinners, will then exist no more, the self-flattering delusion will be at an end. Your sensual delights will be over; in the room of them, there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, drinking of the wine of the wrath of God, poured out without mixture. O dreadful state of hopeless misery, where their worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched!

Think, O sinners, on the dangerous condition of your poor souls, while there is yet hope of fleeing from the wrath to come. There is but a step between you and death, between you and that everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels. Your breath is in your nostrils, when that departs, your everlasting state is unalterably fixed.

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Your hearts, I fear, are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, so that the threatenings of God, your Maker, and your Judge, make no impressions on them. Is not this a sad indication that you are ripening for ruin? You are sleeping on the bed of carnal security, yet your judgment lingereth not.

Think on the miserable condition of those unhappy men, who were once as careless and as unconcerned as you can be, but are now lifting up their eyes in hell, being in torments, and crying in vain for a drop of water to cool their tongues. They are execrating those days of vanity, when they lived in this world as you do now. They are calling themselves a thousand fools, for that stupidity, that forgetfulness of God, that disregard of the threatenings of his wrath, and of the promises of his mercy, of which you are now living examples.

And ancient writer used to say, "I would not for all the world be in the state of an unconverted man for one hour, lest, in that hour, death should cut me off, and the dungeon of eternal darkness receive me." What shall I say to you, O poor unconcerned sinners, to rouse you from your fatal security? Who can dwell with devouring fire! Who can dwell with everlasting burnings! Will you not begin seriously to inquire how you shall escape that dreadful and never-ending punishment,

which is the just reward of your multiplied transgressions? Must it always be the lot of poor ministers to labour in vain, and to say, with the lamenting prophet, "Who hath believed our report?" If you die in a state of impenitence, you will most certainly feel, ere long, what you will not now believe. The threatenings of God's holy word will not fall to the ground. In the latter day, when all hope is past, you will consider them, and feel to your cost, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. You say, "I shall have peace though I walk in the way of my own heart," but it will be seen by and by, whose word shall stand, yours, or that of the God of truth. Death and judgment will decide the controversy.

Perhaps some will say, " You are very harsh and severe; why do you dwell so much upon God's favour? Will he disown his creatures? We hope he is more merciful than you would represent him."

To this I answer, by asking such persons, “ Do you imagine that all men are in a state of acceptance with their Maker? Do you think that none shall be hereafter punished for their crimes? If you will not believe the awful declarations of his own mouth, but make the God of truth a liar, you will be convinced of your mistake, when conviction will come too late, and cost you dear. Hath he not said, that he

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he will not be merciful to any wicked and impenitent transgressor? Hath he not said of some, "They are a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them, he that formed them will shew them no favour?"

How dreadful is the state of that man who cannot be happy unless God falsify his word, but who must perish if his word be true! He hath said most positively, for substance, that impenitent persons are not in his favour, that unconverted, unholy men cannot be saved, yet you hope it may be otherwise: that is to say, you hope that he who speaks to you in his sacred word, is not God; for, if he be God, he must be holy, righteous, just and true, and not altogether such a one as yourselves. But know, O sinners, that justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. He will by no means clear the guilty, the persevering sinner. He will reprove you, and set your sins in order before you. Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you.

There are some persons who may be called *presumers* on God's favour. They imagine themselves in a state of acceptance with their Maker, yet have no scriptural evidence of their being so. But that confidence, which is not supported by the divine word, is no better than presumption. A poor man

may imagine that a distant relation, who is very rich, will bequeath to him a considerable part of his inheritance; but if he has no promise, nor any kind of intimation from the proprietor of the estate, that he will do so, the poor man's expectation is ill founded; in fact it is presumption. It is like the wild conceit of the infatuated *Athenian*, who imagined that every ship which entered the harbour was his own. In matters of religion, we often find those persons the most confident, who have the least ground or reason to be so.

There is a manifest difference between a presumptuous sinner, and a man of real piety. The one is bold and confident, without any regard to the declarations of God in his sacred word; the other is jealous over himself, lest he should be deceived, and often distressed with fears and misgivings of mind. The one talks of nothing but the mercy of God, without any regard to his holiness, his justice and his truth. The other is affected with that view of the divine character which is given us in the bible. He trembles before the Majesty of a sin-avenging God; and can take no encouragement from any proposed system, which does not discover how divine justice can be satisfied for the offences he has committed, as well as mercy displayed in pardoning them. Nothing can give his

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wounded conscience relief, but that which secures due honour to God, in all his attributes.

The presuming sinner regards nothing so much as his own security from destruction; the gracious man is concerned, not only about the pardon of his sins, and the justification of his person, but about the purification of his heart, and the conformity of his life to the will of God. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and cries with the Psalmist, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments." He knows, that though the salvation of the soul is entirely of the free grace of God, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, yet where that salvation is experienced in reality, the fruits of it will be apparent. This consideration prevents him from being too bold and confident in concluding upon his interest in the divine favour. It is far from being my intention to encourage a state of suspense, of doubting, and of distrust, in the minds of sincere christians. Let not such cast away their confidence, but rather let them give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. The reader should remember, that I am now addressing myself to such as presume that they are in God's favour, on improper and uncertain grounds. For instance,

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One man thinks himself in God's favour, because he is indulged with worldly prosperity. But this we have seen is an improper conclusion. Another thinks well of his state because he is attended with many troubles and calamities. But afflictions are no signs of favour, unless they are sanctified, and produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness in those who are exercised thereby. One thinks his state good because he hears the word preached regularly, and enjoys the ordinances of God in their appointed seasons. But many will say at last, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets;" to whom the great Judge will reply, "I never knew you." Another concludes he is one of God's children, because he has acquired a good degree of religious knowledge, can talk fluently on divine subjects, and expresses himself in prayer with great readiness and propriety. But let him remember, that *Judas* had gifts as well as the rest of the apostles; and though a person could speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, he is nothing.

One man thinks himself in the favour of God, because his life is very different to what it was at a former period. But reformation is not regeneration. Another concludes he is the object of God's love, because he is bountiful and liberal to the necessitous.

essituous. But though I should give all my goods to feed the poor and have not charity, I am nothing. One man is persuaded of his interest in God's favour, because he every-day offers up many prayers, and attends to other religious duties. But the hypocritical pharisees made long prayers; and *Saul*, before his conversion, thought himself blameless touching the righteousness which is of the law. Another concludes it is well with him, because he finds pleasure and joy in religious exercises. But let him read with serious attention the parable of the sower. A certain class of professors are there described, who heard the word with joy, but having no root in themselves, their profession came to nothing. From all these hints it is plain, that a man may easily flatter himself into a mistaken confidence of his being in the favour of God, and think himself something when in fact he is nothing, and so deceive his own soul.

Many of the things which I have mentioned are in themselves good and commendable; but they are not sufficient evidences of God's special favour. More substantial and satisfying grounds should be inquired after, according to the word of God. There is no case in which men are more liable to deception than that which is now under our consideration;

deration; nor is there any case in which a deception is attended with greater danger.

The prophet *Micah* had to do with a self-flattering race of men in his day, who said, "Is not the Lord among us? No evil can come unto us." Alas! poor sinners; it is not your bold and unshaken confidence of safety, but scriptural evidence, that is to be regarded, in this weighty concern. It is awful to hear deluded sinners speak of their elevated hopes of being in God's favour, while it is evident from the temper of their minds, and the whole conduct of their lives, that they have neither part nor lot in this matter, but are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Can you be in God's favour who never experienced a real change from nature to grace? You who were never delivered from the power of darkness, never translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son? You who never knew what evangelical repentance means; who never had your hearts purified by faith in the divine Saviour?

Can you imagine yourselves to be in God's favour, who never devoted yourselves to him, to be governed, ruled and guided by him? You who are satisfied with the mere form of godliness without its power? You who take pleasure in secret sins, live in them, and are unwilling to part with them? Have
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you never read, never seriously considered, the words of the pious Psalmist, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer."

The world may flatter you; if you seek the praise of men, you may have your reward. Even good men, in the judgment of charity, may be disposed to think well of you. You may have quietness in your own consciences, and lull yourselves to sleep on the bed of security, and still be in a state of the greatest danger. Like the foolish virgins, you may come to a shut door at last, when he from within will say unto you, "Depart from me, I know you not, ye workers of iniquity." O that you may see your danger before it be too late! Read with seriousness the parable just referred to, I mean that of the ten virgins. The foolish ones saw their error when, alas! it could not be rectified. They applied indeed to the wise, but their application was fruitless. In vain they cried, "Lord, Lord, open to us." The door of mercy was shut for ever, and the workers of iniquity utterly and finally disowned. "Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." But to those who trifle the golden moments away in folly and delusion, there will remain nothing but the blackness of darkness for ever.

O death, thou king of terrors ! dreadful name ?
 What tongue can e'er describe, what pencil draw
 The scenes of horror which surround thy throne ?
 O let me then, arous'd, reflect in time,
 And make this awful, this important theme
 Familiar to my thoughts ! Awake, my soul,
 Nor, careless, slumber on the brink of fate.
 'Midst constant warnings, calls and admonitions,
 Can I be unconcern'd ?—At length mine eyes,
 Long held in mists, blinded with visions false,
 Begin to open on the scene before me.
 Let idly-active fancy now no more
 Spread her deluding colours to my view.

O may I seek, while mercy points the way,
 A firm, clear title to those blest abodes
 Prepar'd for holy souls, beyond the stars !
 That when this tott'ring tabernacle fails,
 This house of clay, which shakes with ev'ry wind,
 Shall be dissolv'd, and fall to dust and ruin,
 My happy soul, renew'd by grace divine,
 And wash'd in my Redeemer's blood, may rise
 To dwell with him in heav'n ! Then shall I know
That in the favour of my God is life.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

The Subject farther improved by Way of Conviction.

WE have already observed that the special favour of God is manifestly distinct from the common blessings and bounties of his indulgent providence. These latter instances of favour are too often abused, by those on whom they are liberally bestowed. They certainly ought to be improved so as to humble us under a sense of our sins, and to lead us to repentance of them. To this purpose the apostle *Paul* writes to the *Romans*. "Despiseſt thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" These silken cords of kindness should draw our hearts nearer to God. His goodness should attract our affections to himself.

Had you received a thousandth part of the kindness from men, which you daily receive from the Almighty, you would be affected by it, and think yourselves under great obligations to those who had shewn you such kindness. And shall all the kindness of your Maker be lost upon you? Where, in this case, is your gratitude, your ingenuousness

of spirit? What returns do you make? Much is required of those on whom much is bestowed. If no proper use be made of the abundant blessings of providence, if they are not improved to a proper end, the reckoning will be awful at last, in the great day of accounts. It appears to have been our Lord's intention to make us sensible of this, in the parable of the talents. Those who made no proper use of their lord's money, with which they were intrusted, are denominated slothful and wicked servants, and dealt with accordingly.

The prophet's observation is verified in many instances; "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." To be unmoved and unhumbled amidst innumerable instances of providential kindness, is a sad indication that we are of the number of those whom the divine word denominates wicked men. That person is in a dangerous condition, upon whom the most likely means to produce repentance have no effect. That ground must be bad which the common methods of cultivation, and the showers of Heaven do not make fruitful. Awful are the words of the apostle to the *Hebrews*; they should be read with fear and trembling by such persons as we are now addressing; "The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet

meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

But there is another class of men still more impious than those to whom we have been speaking; those, we mean, who pervert the favours of providence to a wrong use and end. Their conduct somewhat resembles that of those ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. They make use of the blessings of God's goodness, as provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, in gluttony, drunkenness, pride, and impurity. In their hands, the bounties of Heaven become weapons of unrighteousness, incentives to sin, and instruments whereby they may serve Satan, and the more successfully promote his diabolical cause among men. He whose goodness they thus wretchedly pervert and abuse, will most assuredly resent their conduct. The whole creation groans under the weight of their guilt.

The Lord says concerning rebellious *Israel*, by the prophet *Hosea*, "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for *Baal*. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof,

and will recover my wool and my flax." What pity is it that God's indulgence should be abused to his dishonour! The more his bounty shines on perverse and rebellious men, the more luxuriant is the growth of their vicious habits. But it will appear by and by, that as God hath favours to bestow, he hath also justice to execute his threatened displeasure. Though sentence against evil works be not executed speedily, let not the hearts of the children of men be fully set in them to do evil; for the day is coming when abused goodness will no longer forbear. Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish shall be awarded to every soul of man who continueth to do evil.

Where grace can neither melt nor move,
 The Lamb repents his injured love,
 Awakes his wrath without delay,
 And *Judah's* Lion tears the prey.

The subject will furnish us with a word of conviction also for those who put no value upon God's special favour. Among these, some there are who are more desirous of friendship with the great men of this world, than of friendship with God. An ambitious pursuit after the honour which cometh from men is one of the grand obstructions to true faith, and real piety. "How can ye believe who

receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" The apostle tells us, that the friendship of this world is enmity with God, and, consequently, that if any man will be, at all events, the friend of the world, he is the enemy of God. *Moses* put a proper value on the divine favour, when he esteemed even the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of *Egypt*.

It is an high attainment to be able to say, with truth and sincerity, 'Lord, let me have thy favour, though, in my adherence to thee, I should forfeit the regard of every man upon earth.' Reader, consider within yourself, what good the favour of the great can do you in the hour of death, or at the day of judgment. Can they give bail for you, when you are arrested by the king of terrors? Can they stand forth in your defence at the awful bar of God? Nay, can their friendship even free you either from pangs of conscience, or pains of body? In these cases, they can afford no help, when help is most of all needed. The favour of God alone can answer these purposes. Yet upon this few men put any proper value.

But there are others of dispositions still more base and sordid, who prefer impure and sensual gratifications to the favour of the Most High. They have no concern about friendship with their Maker;

the pleasures of sin, though but for a season, are all they crave. The apostle *Paul* speaks of these with grief and indignation, "Whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame." They make the gratification of carnal views and pleasures their principal aim; the pampering of their own brutal appetites, in rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, is their chief good. They even boast of those things, which, instead of being to their honour, are scandalous and disgraceful to human nature. The end of such men, without repentance, we are assured, is destruction. The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever. The divine favour which real christians enjoy, will make them perfectly and everlastingly happy, when the sons of sensuality are lifting up their eyes in hell, being in torments.

These men have their good things here; they have such a measure of the bounty of providence, as perhaps some of God's dear children are denied; whose lot it is to be poor in this world, but rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has prepared for them that love him; who entreat the divine favour with their whole hearts; who earnestly long and daily pray for the assured tokens of it; and

and such shall not be disappointed. But as the poet sings,

Fools never raise their thoughts so high,
Like brutes they live, like brutes they die;
Like grass they flourish, till thy breath
Blast them in everlasting death.

Our Lord teaches us, in the parable of the rich man and *Lazarus*, that in the world to come, the miserable sons of sensuality will behold the felicity of those in heaven, whom they have seen in a state of affliction and poverty upon earth; and that this discovery will be a great aggravation of their own misery. "The rich man died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw *Abraham* afar off, and *Lazarus* in his bosom." He had a discovery of the seat and company of the blessed, which added weight to his own misery, and so much the more, as there he beheld poor *Lazarus*, whom he had formerly neglected and despised, in a state of perfect tranquillity, honour and joy.

O how terrible and insupportable will the reflections of those men be in that day, who have lived only after the flesh, and had no regard for the favour of him, on whom all our felicity depends!

Reader,

Reader, descend with me, by way of contemplation, into the dismal abodes of horror and despair, and listen, for a moment, to the cries and lamentations of one of those lost souls, who once wallowed in sensual delights, and lived without God in the world.

“Woe is me, wretch that I am! This is the end of my ungodly courses, the just reward of my evil deeds. I lived regardless of my own everlasting welfare. I disregarded the awful threatenings of that just and holy Being, whose anger now falls upon me, like a consuming fire. I took pleasure in that which his soul abhors; I made a mock of sin; but I now find that it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. In vain were friendly warnings given me; in vain was I told, from time to time, that destruction should be to the workers of iniquity. I hardened myself in impiety, and cast off the fear of the Almighty. I flattered myself in my own deceivings and cried peace and safety, till sudden destruction came upon me, as travail upon a woman with child; and now, O hopeless condition! there is no way of escape. I said unto God, *Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* I sought not his favour, I had no regard for friendship with him. Upon this I put no value. And now, I am for ever cut off from all hope of enjoying his blissful presence. The sentence is just which

which consigns me over to these doleful regions of everlasting misery, where the worm dieth not, where the fire which consumes me is never to be quenched! Those happy souls, whose lives of penitence, piety and devotion on earth I counted madness, are now numbered with the saints, and enjoy the bliss of heaven, while I am for ever excluded! I now find to my cost that the wages of sin is death. I am lost, lost for ever. Destruction is come upon me from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Perhaps some into whose hands these papers may fall, may be conscious within themselves that they have been hitherto indifferent about the favour of God. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would gladly persuade such to take this subject into serious consideration. It is not a vain thing, a concern of little moment; it is for your life; as it is only in the divine favour that life is to be enjoyed. How shall ye escape eternal death, if ye neglect the messages of salvation! Perhaps your language, your behaviour, your whole conversation, and even your conscience bear witness against you, that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Permit me to ask you, Are your cares, your hopes, your fears, your exercises of mind employed about peace and friendship with God, through Jesus Christ?

Christ? Do you seriously examine yourself whether you be in the faith? Can you, like the Psalmist, address your Maker with sincerity, and say, "I entreated thy favour with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to thy word." Are your waking thoughts much employed about this greatest of all concerns? What the Almighty once said concerning the *Jews*, deserves particular notice. "My people would not hearken to my voice, and *Israel* would none of me." They valued not my friendship or favour. "So I gave them up unto their own hearts lust; and they walked in their own counsels." It is a dreadful judgment, when sinners are left to themselves, to fill up the measure of their iniquity, and to perish in their own deceivings. "*Ephraim* is joined to idols, let him alone."—It will be seen what his end will be; what efforts he can use to secure his heart from terror, and his soul from torment, in the day of awful visitation.—Where will he then flee for help, and where will he leave his glory? I will laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear cometh. Then shall he call upon me, but I will not answer; for that he hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord; he would none of my counsel, he despised all my reproof.

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I might, in the last place, address myself to those, who not only disregard the favour of God themselves, but dislike and even persecute the men who profess their humble hope of interest in it. But I know there is little prospect of gaining the attention of such persons, or of convincing them of the evil of their doings. They, who are in the flesh, have, in all ages, been disposed, more or less, to persecute those who are in the spirit. They hate a man for his love to God, and ridicule him for his piety and devotion. When *Stephen* the martyr said, I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, the frantic *Jews*, with satanic rage, exclaimed against him, stopped their ears, ran upon him like madmen, and stoned him to death.

Those who make it the business of their lives to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, to pursue with becoming ardour the one thing needful, and to give diligence to make their calling and election sure, are often branded with the name of hypocrites or enthusiasts. What Jesus said to his disciples is found to be true, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. Men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you; but rejoice ye in that day, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for

for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Men of a persecuting spirit should beware lest they be found fighting against God. It is awful, not only to be regardless of the divine favour themselves, but to take up arms against all those who are seeking to know their own personal interest in it. Let such consider what the gracious Redeemer said to *Saul of Tarsus*, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.*" Our divine Master will take the part of his servants, and vindicate their cause against all their opposers.

Lord, my wild passions rage within,
Nor thy commands obey;
And flesh and sense, enslav'd by sin,
Draw my best thoughts away.

Do thou create my soul anew,
Conform my heart to thine,
Melt down my will, and let it flow,
And take the mould divine.

Seize my whole frame by thine own hand,
My pow'rs to thee I bring;
Manage the wheels by thy command,
And govern ev'ry spring.

CHAP. X.

*The Subject improved by Way of Conviction to the
real Children of God.*

HAVING, in the preceding chapter, addressed those who are in a state of unregeneracy, I shall now turn myself to such as have been called by divine grace, out of darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel. These are in a state of reconciliation and friendship with God; they have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and can bear witness, by their own experience, that a sense of the favour of God is a privilege which may be enjoyed. Yet, as they have within them the depravity of nature, and are prone to go astray from the path of rectitude, it may be necessary to attempt some improvement of the subject by way of conviction to them. The word of God is profitable, not only for doctrine, but for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

It is possible for you, my dear friends, to undervalue the privilege of friendship with your Maker. His favour certainly ought to be esteemed by you, at all times, above every thing else that can be thought of. You should have such a lively sense of

its importance, as may constrain you to say, on all occasions, "In his favour is life; his loving-kindness is better than life." But the objects of sense are so near you, and so apt to captivate attention, that you perhaps too frequently lose the sweet and comfortable sense of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Few of us, I fear, are so affected with this subject as we ought to be. We do not stir up ourselves, as the prophet speaks, to lay hold on God, to claim interest in him, as reconciled to us through the death of his Son. We do not labour to quicken our dull and drowsy souls, to aspire after an assured evidence of his favour, and an habitual sense of the greatness of this privilege. We are too indifferent about it, and can live day after day, at ease, without any peculiar manifestation of our Father's love. Most certainly it ought to be otherwise. We sometimes sit down pleased and contented with the common blessings of his hand, without aspiring after endeared communion, intimacy and fellowship with him who should be our all in all.

My dearly beloved, are the consolations of God small in your esteem? Have you but little regard for his tokens of favour? Is it a matter of indifference with you, whether he lift up the light of his countenance upon you or not? The great concern

cern of the Redeemer upon earth, the important business he had to accomplish by his agonies and his blood, was to reconcile you to God, that you might be brought into a state of friendship with him. This is the grand subject of all the promises of grace. The gospel is the word of reconciliation. The office of the Holy Spirit is to make application of this to your hearts, and to give you the comfortable assurance of it. The Lord of life and glory declares, that he waits to be gracious unto you. And is it possible that you should be indifferent about it!

There is a day coming when an assured sense of the divine favour will be deemed of the greatest importance by you, and when your former indifference about it will occasion painful reflections. Be ashamed then of your present sluggishness.—Think within yourselves, how unaccountable it is, that the children of God should prize their Father's love no more. What can be of equal value with it? The full enjoyment of it constitutes the felicity of that world to which all your wishes and hopes are, or should be directed. For in the presence of Jehovah is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. If therefore you put not a proper value on it at present, it is too evident, that you are greatly defective as to your meetness

for the inheritance of the saints in light. You want more spirituality of mind, and heavenliness of temper.

There are others of God's children who frequently call in question their own interest in his favour. They are greatly dispirited, discouraged, and dejected on this account. They have many fears, jealousies, and misgivings of heart about it. Like the Psalmist in his gloomy hours of despondency, they remember God, and are troubled; they complain, and their spirit is overwhelmed with grief. They are ready to say, "I fear the Lord is not my God; I fear I have no interest in his favour." They approach to his throne with sad and sorrowful hearts, or are kept at a distance from him through fears of his displeasure. And the more they think of their own sinfulness and unworthiness, the more they are deterred from drawing nigh to him. Conscious guilt, and oppressive fears damp the spirit of devotion. "My sins," says such a one, "hang heavy on my soul. I dare not lift up mine eyes to heaven. The justice of the great Judge of all terrifies me, and his mercy, I fear, is far from me. My soul is shut up in darkness, and my mind is filled with terror. I am afraid God will call my sins to remembrance, and instead of enjoying the light of his countenance, I have

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reason to fear he will look on me in his awful displeasure. I dare not neglect the exercises of devotion which I know are matter of duty, but I cannot come boldly to the throne of grace, and cry, Abba, Father."

This uncomfortable state of mind is much to be lamented. Where is that sense of God's love, that trust in the divine mercy, that delight in God, that rejoicing in his salvation, to which we are every where encouraged? Legal terrors prevail, in the room of evangelical tenderness, in many minds. The heart is full of fear, which should be constrained by love. Devotion borders upon servility, instead of being the exercise of filial affection. In the room of that reverence and godly fear which the divine word recommends, the poor soul is kept at distance through a spirit of bondage.

Let such persons contemplate the grace of the gospel, the complete redemption which is in Jesus Christ, his ability to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, and the free promises of grace and mercy. Jesus said to his disciples, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Such persons would do well to consider, that he who is infinitely great and holy, is also infinitely gracious. His mercy triumphs over all the sins and unworthiness of man. In mercy he de-

lights. His favour is towards them that fear him; he takes pleasure in those that hope in his mercy. It is his will that his poor unworthy children should rejoice in his salvation, while they are deeply humbled for their offences against him. The joy of the Lord is their strength. Unbelief and despondency tend to weaken their hands, to deprive them of comfort, and to rob God of the glory due unto his name.

Sometimes this gloomy state of mind is, in some degree, occasioned by a misinterpretation of providential dispensations. You are visited with personal or domestic afflictions, you sustain heavy losses, or you meet with continual disappointments in the concerns of this present world. And you conclude from these, that instead of being interested in God's favour, you are marked out as a monument of his displeasure. But this is not a just interpretation of God's mysterious dispensations. In many passages of his holy word, God assures his children, that his heart is towards them when his afflicting hand is upon them. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." His corrective rod is the rod of love. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord,

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nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.* Have you not read of glorying in tribulation? Do you never reflect on that memorable passage in the prophecy of *Habakkuk*? "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

The Lord has seen it meet to lay his chastening hand upon you, and you faint under it. You are filled with fearful apprehensions of his wrath, and ready to say, "I am undone; he is come to call my sins to remembrance; his arrows of indignation are shot against me. These are the beginnings of sorrow, and what the end will be, I know not."

My

* Mr. *James Creswick*, an eminent minister, a native of *Sheffield*, in *Yorkshire*, suffered joyfully the spoiling of his goods for the cause of Christ; he was greatly afflicted in his eyes, and endured much under the tormenting pains of the stone; all which he bore with exemplary patience. He used frequently to say, "Lord, I am thine, and thou canst do me no wrong. I had rather have health of soul, in a body full of pain, than health and ease of body, with a distempered soul."

My brother, these are erroneous conclusions, equally dishonourable to God, and distressful to yourself. What you call arrows of indignation may more properly be termed instances of love. He who is infinite in wisdom as well as boundless in mercy, sees the necessity of this wholesome discipline, for the promotion of your best interests. He chastens you for your profit, to make you partaker of his holiness.

Perhaps you were too much attached to some created object, as *Jonah* was exceeding glad because of his gourd. That object is removed, that your heart may be more entirely given to God, and that he may reign there without a rival. A state of uninterrupted prosperity might intoxicate your mind, and lead you to forget your Redeemer, to neglect the affairs of your soul, and the concerns of a future world. Your earthly hopes and flattering prospects are therefore blasted, that you may set your affections on things above. The stream is dried up, by drinking too deeply of which you might have been surfeited, that you may drink more freely of the fountain of the water of life. These dispensations, therefore, mysterious as they are, are nevertheless dispensations of love. When rightly understood, they are instances and proofs of the good-will of him who dwelt in the bush. When
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you are tempted to say with the patriarch, in the season of despondency, "All these things are against me," recollect the words of an inspired apostle, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and say,

Then why, my soul, these sad complaints?
Still while he frowns, his bowels move;
Still on his heart he bears his saints,
And feels their sorrows, and his love.

Permit me farther to observe, that the children of God are sometimes apt to call in question the reality of his special tokens of favour and kindness. When they are indulged with the consolations of his Holy Spirit, they are jealous lest these should be only the delusions of Satan. While men, whose hearts are not right in the sight of God, are too bold and presuming, the humble followers of the Lamb are prone to err through an excess of timidity. * When the Lord is pleased to afford unto his

* Mr. Walter Marshall, of Hursley, in Hampshire, was much exercised with troubled thoughts for many years. He sought for peace of conscience by many

his desponding children gracious intimations of his favour, it is unquestionably criminal in them, to call these but sparks of their own kindling, or delusions of *Satan*.

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many mortifying methods, but his troubles still increased. He consulted an eminent minister about his case, giving him an account of the state of his soul, and particularizing the sins which lay heavy on his conscience. The minister, Dr. T. G. wrote to him in reply, that he had forgot to mention the greatest sin of all, that of unbelief, or not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins, and the sanctification of his nature. Upon this he set himself to the studying and preaching of Christ; and attained to peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in conjunction with an eminent degree of holiness. His book on *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, so much recommended by the late Mr. *James Hervey*, was the fruit of his own experience. A little before his death, he said to those about him, "I die in the full persuasion of the truth, and in the comfort of that doctrine which I have preached to others." His last words were, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The book, just mentioned, is abridged, and some passages in it which were liable to abuse, very judiciously guarded against a wrong construction, by the late pious and sensible Mr. *Benjamin Forsett*.

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It is a certain truth that *Satan* can transform himself into an angel of light; but the sealings and witnessings of the Holy Spirit, if properly attended to, carry their own evidence along with them. And by the sacred touch-stone of God's word, every thing of this kind ought to be tried. The effects of God's gracious manifestations of favour to the soul, bespeak their reality, and distinguish them from every thing of a delusive nature.

Has not the Lord often, by his holy word and Spirit, poured divine comforts into your desponding mind? Has he not raised your heart to himself, in hope and trust, joy and confidence? Has he not enabled you to derive encouragement from the gospel remedy? Have you not, to the relief of your pained heart, and the healing of your wounded conscience, beheld the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world? Have not these views melted your heart into penitence, inspired you with love to Jesus, zeal for his honour, desire after holiness, and indignation against sin? And can you, afterwards, in a season of darkness, call this deception and delusion? Surely you will not cherish so unworthy a thought.

What would you think of the child of an earthly parent, who, after he has had the strongest proofs of paternal affection, should count them all as nothing,

thing, and say, "I have been deceived; my father does not love me?" Would you not think such a child very ungrateful? What then will you think of yourself? There is a passage apposite to our purpose, in the prophecy of *Malachi*. "I have loved you, saith the Lord; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" They had the boldness to ask, in what instance, in what one particular case he had shewn favour and kindness to them. Surely, this must be displeasing to the Holy One of *Israel*. Yet when *Zion* said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," he condescends to expostulate with her on the subject, in the tenderest manner. "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

Though the evidences of divine favour be clear and strong, yet we sometimes, through darkness of mind, do not distinguish them, or else, through obstinacy in grief and despondency, we refuse to be comforted. In either case, the error lies in ourselves. But this is our comfort, the Lord sees our weakness, and pities our helpless souls. The compassionate Redeemer was tempted in all points like as we are, that he might know how to succour those that are tempted. "If thou be the Son of God,"

God," was the ground of his first temptation in the wilderness. In like manner the enemy comes to us, "If thou be a child of God, but what reason hast thou to believe that thou art? Is it possible that so vile, so polluted, so unworthy a sinner, should be bold enough to claim the high privilege?"

After all, the safest course to be taken for relief in a season of darkness, is not to look within ourselves for encouragement, but to turn our eyes to the divine remedy, and to believe, as we are enabled, the free proclamations of mercy through Jesus Christ to sinners as such. Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Fly to the hope the gospel gives,
The man, that trusts the promise, lives.

It highly becomes us to beware of displeasing the Lord by unthankfulness for the favours he bestows upon us. Ingratitude is the grave in which many mercies are buried and concealed. *Moses* composed a song to be sung by the *Israelites*, to perpetuate the memory of God's kindness to them, through all succeeding generations. This song is recorded in the thirty-second chapter of the book of *Deuteronomy*, and deserves an attentive perusal by us in New Testament times.

To receive many favours, and to be totally unconcerned about making returns, is ungrateful, and very unsuitable to the temper with which every true christian should be inspired. "Surely," says the Psalmist, "the righteous shall give thanks to thy name." He was so affected himself with God's goodness, that he could not rest on his bed in the hours appointed for repose, but rose at midnight to give thanks to him. The apostle *Paul* was not less eminent for his grateful, than for his prayerful disposition. Thanks be to God;—I thank Christ Jesus our Lord;—with other expressions of like import, frequently occur in his writings.

Ingratitude is a vice for which the very heathens are condemned in the word of God. It stands connected with the vilest abominations. It indicates something worse than brutish stupidity; for the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but the unthankful acknowledge not the hand that feeds, protects and clothes them. Reader, if this is your prevailing disposition, be ashamed of it. The God, in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, have you not glorified. To overlook and entirely to forget unnumbered favours, denotes a base, unworthy, disingenuous spirit. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you surely look upon yourself as under obligation to thank God for your

daily

—XII. 34

daily bread, and will you not be thankful for spiritual food? You have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and received many spiritual blessings from him; illumination, conviction, relief and comfort; and do you count these as nothing? Do not these distinguishing mercies demand praise? Is not thankfulness the tribute which you ought to pay for them? Can you do less than acknowledge what God has done for your soul? * Will you not say,

O, if I had a thousand tongues,
And could be heard from pole to pole,
I would to all the list'ning world
Declare thy goodness to my soul!

The

* 'The christian hath as large a field for the exercise of his thankfulness, in praising God, as he hath in the petitionary part of prayer, for his desires.— This duty circumscribes heaven and earth; it takes both worlds in its circumference. "In every thing give thanks." O what a copious theme hath God given his people, upon which to enlarge their meditations! "In every thing." The whole course and series of divine providence towards the saints, is like a music-book, in every leaf of which there is a song ready set for them to learn, and sing to the praise of their God. To skip over one note in a lesson may spoil the grace of the music.

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The Psalmist desired that others might assist him, and join with him in the work of praise. "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." If you are not thankful, God is robbed of the glory due unto his name, and your own soul is deprived of the comfort his mercies would otherwise afford you. May the Author of all good raise your affections to himself, and with all his other gifts bestow on you a thankful heart, to taste those gifts with joy! With-

out

We are unworthy of the least mercy; and therefore God is worthy of praise for the least, because it is more than he owes us. Common mercies are many. "O God," says *David*, "how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with thee." As if he had said, "There is not a point of time wherein thou art not doing me good. As soon as I open mine eyes in the morning, I have a new theme, to employ my praiseful meditations."

The sincerity of the heart is shewn more in thankfulness for ordinary mercies, than for those which are more extraordinary. As it shews a base disposition when a man upon every slight temptation is drawn into sin, so the soul discovers a high degree of grace, to take the hint from every common mercy to bless and praise God.' *Gurnal.*

out this, as you bury former mercies, so you may deprive yourselves of future ones. For thankfulness for past favours, implies a secret craving for more; but how can you expect that God will bestow on you what you still need, if you are not thankful for what you already possess? Labour therefore to rouse up your dull heart to the great and pleasant exercise of praise. Call upon your soul, and all that is within you, to bless the Lord, and not to forget his benefits. Let your language be, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord, now in the presence of all his people."

When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love and praise.

But to go a step farther. The Lord's people are not only chargeable with unthankfulness, but, in some cases, with an unsuitable behaviour, amidst the favours they receive from his hand. When his benefits have been showered down upon us in great abundance, our hearts have still been barren, and our lives unfruitful. Nay, perhaps, after sweet

enlargements, and divine manifestations, we have sunk into supineness, and security, or been drawn aside by temptation, and captivated afresh by the sin which easily besets us. This is shameful indeed. "The Lord will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly." There is great need for this caution. And as it is an evil thing and bitter that any should sin against God, it is more especially so in those who have received peculiar favours from him. The more kindness he hath shewn to any one, and the greater is the aggravation of his offences. On this ground it was, that the Lord thus spoke to his ancient people; "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord! Have I been a wilderness to *Israel*? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. The children of *Israel* and the children of *Judah* have only done evil before me,—they have only provoked me to anger." As if all the world beside them were comparatively innocent.

For as those who have obtained mercy sin against greater professions and engagements on their part, so they sin against the greatest advantages and obligations conferred upon them by their gracious

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Benefactor. The principles he has implanted in their hearts are the effects of his favour, and in their own nature should be a defence against sin. To have an enlightened mind, a renewed will, sanctified affections, and an awakened conscience, are great advantages; and to sin against all these, is an high aggravation of the offence. *David* seems to have had a sense of this, when in his penitent acknowledgment of his crimes before God, he said, "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom;" or, as some read it, thou hast made me to know wisdom: as if he had said, These offences are worse in me than they would have been in those who have not these corrective principles to restrain sin, and to lead to the practice of holiness.

We have said likewise, that those who have obtained mercy sin against greater obligations laid upon them by their heavenly Father. Thus he speaks by the prophet *Hosea*; "I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love. But my people are bent to backsliding from me." In another place, "Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. I have written the great things of my law, but they were count-

counted as a strange thing." By others of his holy prophets, the Lord speaks with great emphasis and energy on this head. "My covenant they brake, though I was an husband unto them." When the church is compared to a vineyard, it is asked, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done unto it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? * This strongly expresses God's tender care of his people, and their unworthy return to his goodness.

If you, into whose hands these papers may fall, have thus requited the Lord, let the following pointed address take hold of your consciences, and sink deep into your hearts. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. *Israel* was holiness to the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase. What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, † and have walked after

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* Wherefore brought it forth poisonous berries?

Dr. Lowth.

† He that put away his wife was to give her a bill of divorcement, declaring the cause of his separating himself from her. Thus the Almighty condescends

to

vanity, and become vain? O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me." Have you any testimony to bring against the Lord? Has he not always dealt with you in great mercy? And yet you have treacherously and ungratefully departed from him. Let your repentings be kindled, and your hearts be grieved within you, that you have thus requited your kind and compassionate Father.

The sins of the ungodly world bring down the wrath of the Almighty upon them. But the sins of God's people grieve him at his heart, speaking after the manner of men. They vex his Holy Spirit, and provoke his fatherly displeasure. He looked, so to speak, that it should be otherwise with those to whom he had manifested so much love. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he

to expostulate with us, and asks what evil we can charge upon him, his government, or his dealings with us, that we forsake him. But here we must be silent, and lay our hands upon our mouths. No more cause can be given, than why cattle feeding in a sweet and rich pasture, through their unruly disposition, break down the hedge to get into a dirty lane, or a barren wilderness, where nothing is to be had to satisfy hunger.

he redeemed them;—but they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit.” He complains that he is broken with their unfaithful conduct, and pressed with their sins, as a cart is pressed with sheaves.

Among men it is very grievous, when a child, or a friend, on whom we have bestowed many favours and kindneses, behaves in a base, ungrateful and unworthy manner. We are ready to say, “If it had been an enemy, I could have borne it.” Thus the Lord, in the passages introduced above, addresses us in a way which is very familiar and moving, and of which we are capable of judging by our own feelings.

When *Cæsar* saw *Brutus*, on whom he had conferred innumerable favours, engaged in the conspiracy against his life, he could refrain no longer, but cried out, “And thou too, Brutus!” So may the great Head of the church, the Father of his people, say to us, “What thou too, my son, my child, whom I have taken into so near a relation to myself, on whom I have bestowed blessings without number; to whom I have manifested myself repeatedly, as I do not to the world, with whom I have dealt familiarly, and from whom I expected returns of love, of honour, and of grateful obedience; dost thou deal treacherously with me; dost thou withdraw thy affections from
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me, give thy heart to another, and trample on my laws and commands? Is this thy kindness to thy Father and thy Friend! I say concerning others, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies; but what shall I say to thee? My thoughts towards thee are thoughts of peace, and not of evil. Oh *Ephraim*, what shall I do unto thee? O *Judah*, what shall I do unto thee? Do you thus requite me, O foolish people and unwise?

“ I have made use of gentle means and methods with you. I have sought to win your love, and gain your hearts. But my kindness is disesteemed, and my love slighted. Behold I will melt thee, and try thee; for how shall I do to the daughter of my people? I will hedge up her way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find her paths. I have seen her ways and I will heal her. I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.”

Let this view of the favour and loving-kindness of the Lord towards you, and of your own unkindness towards him, affect your hearts as it ought to do. What hath the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that he with-holds from you? The sun, the moon, and the stars are ordained to give you light. The treasures of the sea and the land

land are for your use. The angels are servants to your heavenly Father; they disdain not to minister to your comfort. They afford you protection by day, and watch round your beds in the night season.

God has given his only begotten Son to redeem you, and his blessed Spirit to guide and sanctify you. Nay, he gives himself to you. He is your Father, your Portion, your Husband, and your Friend. You shall, by and by, dwell in the same heaven where he resides. You shall be fed at his table, and drink of his cup. "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures." O what an honour is this! And yet no part of it is obtained by your works, or bestowed for your deserts. It is all freely given, through the meritorious death of him who hung upon the tree. But remember, that the tribute of grateful obedience is due from you. The Lord expects this at your hands. He has formed you for this very end. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise." You are his workmanship, not only as men, but as christians, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works, which God hath before ordained that you should walk in them. You are blessed with existence, and with an interest in Christ Jesus, that you may be to him a
name

name and a praise, both in time and to eternity, in this world and that which is to come. O let a sense of his goodness to you, and of your unsuitable returns, humble your hearts before him, and quicken you to diligence, watchfulness and circumspection, through the whole of your remaining days!

Dear Saviour, when my thoughts recal
The wonders of thy grace;
Low at thy feet asham'd I fall,
And hide my blushing face.

Shall love like thine be thus repaid?
Ah, vile, ungrateful heart!
By earth's low cares detain'd, betray'd,
From Jesus to depart.

From Jesus, who alone can give
True pleasure, peace, and rest:
When wand'ring from my Lord, I live
Unsatisfy'd, unblest.

But he, for his own mercy's sake,
My straying soul restores;
He bids my mourning heart partake
The pardon it implores.

Oh! while I breathe to thee, my Lord,
 The penitential sigh,
 Fresh vigour to my soul afford,
 And raise my thoughts on high.

Then shall the mourner at thy feet,
 With fervour seek thy face;
 And grateful own how kind, how sweet
 Is thy restoring grace.

CHAP. XI.

The Subject improved by Way of Examination.

IF the favour of God be the life of his people, it surely becomes us to inquire, with seriousness and solemnity, whether we ourselves are interested in this great privilege or not. Oh that this weighty concern might be cleared up to the satisfaction of every attentive and solicitous reader! The inquiry of such will be, "How shall I know that I am in a state of acceptance and favour with God?" In order to assist you a little in this case, through the divine blessing, I would beg leave to ask you a few plain questions.

Have

Have you ever been awakened to a sense of God's displeasure against you, because of your offences? Have you ever been brought under deep conviction, that the Judge and Governor of the world is justly angry with you, as transgressors of his holy laws? Has the horrible nature of sin ever been opened to your view; so that your souls have been afflicted on account of it? Has the guilt of sin ever laid on your consciences, as a burden too heavy for you to bear? And have you ever been brought to exclaim with the prophet *Isaiah*, "Woe is me, I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips."

When *David* poured out his penitential confessions before God, he spake of a broken heart, and complained of the anguish he felt, as being like that occasioned by broken bones. The arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in him; there was no rest in his bones because of his sin; he even roared by reason of the disquietness of his spirit. Our Lord represents the condition of poor souls, who come to him, as a weary and burdened one. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." *Job* complains, that the terrors of God set themselves in array against him. *Peter's* hearers, when God gave them repentance, were pricked to the heart. *Paul* had the law opened

to him in such a manner, that his sins revived, and he died; his delusive hopes and comforts were at an end; and the law, which was originally ordained to life, he found to be unto death.

The law is our school-master, to bring us unto Christ; its terrors are usually seen and felt, in some degree, before we experience the grace and comforts of the gospel. An apprehension of divine wrath commonly precedes the discoveries of pardoning love; and sin is made bitter to us, before we taste that the Lord is gracious. We receive not the consolation arising from God's favour, generally speaking, till we have seen ourselves in danger of his everlasting displeasure. The poor sinner perceives that he is in a state of condemnation and ruin, and owns that it is of the Lord's mercy he is alive, and not sent to that place of punishment which his crimes have deserved. His mouth is stopped by the consciousness of his guilt, so that he is convinced it would be just in God to cast him off for ever.

I am far from having any design to fix a standard for the degree of penitential disquietude. The convictions of some are attended with much more terror than those of others. I am farther still from having any intention to suggest, that a long course of time is necessary for these discoveries. Peter's hearers

hearers were brought to a sense of their sins, and to discoveries of pardoning mercy on the same day, in the same place, if not under the same sermon. The jailor at *Philippi* saw himself a lost sinner, and rejoiced in the salvation of Jesus the same night.

But I do not find any instance in the word of God, of a man's being filled with the comforts of divine love and favour, who has never had any sense of the evil of sin, or of his own miserable and undone state. That faith does not appear to be of the saving kind, which is not accompanied with repentance from dead works. It is usual for poor sinners to have their minds enlightened to see the nature and number of their crimes, and to be filled with awful apprehensions of the dreadful malignity of sin, before they are brought to rejoice in God's favour and pardoning love. "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord I will praise thee; for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Behold God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he is also become my salvation."

I would ask you farther, Have you been convinced that the whole world cannot procure you an interest in the divine favour? That neither angels

in heaven, nor men on earth; that neither riches, honours, gifts, endowments, nor qualifications of any kind, can reconcile you to God? Are you persuaded that thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil would be of no avail in this case? That should all the holy men on earth unite with the saints in heaven to procure your pardon, they would not prevail? That should *Noah*, *Daniel* and *Job*, *Lot*, *Moses* and *Samuel* stand up to turn away the wrath of God from you, they would not succeed? That if all the angels in heaven should intercede for you, their interposition would not be sufficient? Nay, have you been made sensible that your own prayers, tears, fastings, and humiliations cannot atone for the least of your offences? That nothing wrought in you, or performed by you, can make amends for what you have done amiss, pacify divine wrath, or entitle you to the favour and acceptance of that holy Being against whom you have sinned?

He who is under the teachings and guidance of the holy Spirit of God, is fully persuaded, that his own righteousness is but as filthy rags in point of merit; that no qualifications he can bring, will be of any avail; that nothing can give satisfaction to injured justice, but a sacrifice of infinite value; and such is the sacrifice which Jesus Christ has offered.

offered. It is the blood of that Lamb of God alone which cleanseth from all sin, who, by one offering, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The sinner who is taught of God, dares not approach the divine throne but through a Mediator. He knows that acceptance with him is only in the Beloved; in whom the Father hath declared himself well-pleased. He knows that justice must have full satisfaction, and that this is no where to be found, but in the atonement which the Son of God made, when he appeared in the end of the world, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

I will ask you again; Have you earnestly sought reconciliation with God through the Redeemer? Though there is nothing meritorious in all your seeking, yet this is the appointed mean of coming to the enjoyment of a sense of interest in the divine favour. If the subjects of an earthly potentate have been guilty of treasonable practices against his throne and government, and he has made it known to them, that he will not be reconciled, except they seek his favour through the mediation of his son and heir, the offending subjects can have no ground to expect a reinstatement in their prince's favour, so long as they neglect the appointed way.

Herod was highly displeased with the men of *Tyre* and *Sidon*; but they came with one accord to him,

him, and having made *Blasius*, the king's chamberlain, their friend, desired peace. Have you proceeded in some such way as this, in seeking at God's hand the life of your souls? Do you seek his favour through the mediation, the satisfaction, and the intercession of Jesus? He has rendered the divine throne approachable by sinners. He is the way, the truth, and the life; no man can come to the Father but by him. He hath delivered sinners from the wrath to come, having made peace by the blood of his cross. He gave himself, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. *Joseph* said to his brethren, "Ye shall not see my face, unless ye bring your brother *Benjamin*." So, in effect, the Lord says to us, "Expect no favour with me, but only through him in whom I have declared myself well-pleased."

Do you then make it the business of your lives to seek the blessings of grace through the Redeemer? Do you daily come to the Father by him, entreating his favour with your whole hearts? Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto the Father by him. *

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* We consider the inspired writings as exhibiting a full, free, and everlasting salvation, by Jesus Christ, for the chief of sinners; we consider the testimony of

Permit me to ask you another question; What tokens of favour have you received from that God whom you thus seek? Have you experienced those powerful convictions of sin which we have
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of God concerning his incarnate Son, as a complete warrant for the most guilty and ungodly to believe in him. The word of grace, respecting the perfect work of Christ, being viewed in this light, is deservedly, and by way of singular eminence, called, *The glad tidings.*

Nothing is requisite, in order to a participation of Christ and his benefits, but a grant from God. It is not under the notion of possessing any virtuous disposition; of being, by good habits and qualities, distinguished from other men; of being well humbled for sin; or of being deeply awakened in conscience, that sinners must first believe in Jesus. No: but as transgressors; as in a perishing state; and as having nothing to preserve them from despair, except what the scripture says concerning Christ, his offices, and his grace.

But there is a great and palpable difference between persons, while in their native state, being authorised to *believe* in Jesus; and their being warranted, while in that condition, to conclude themselves to be in the favour of God, and to *expect* final happiness. It is a gross mistake, to suppose, that whoever is warranted,
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mentioned above, as common to all the saved of the Lord? When you have read some portion of the sacred scriptures, or heard the word preached, hath the Holy Spirit set home upon your hearts-and con-

to believe on Christ, is, at the very same instant, merely on the same ground, and while an unbeliever, equally authorized to expect everlasting life.

For he that believes on Christ, looks to him as *justifying the ungodly*; but he who, on scriptural grounds, hopes for future felicity, expects it as a believer; as in a justified state; as having a turn of heart, in some degree suited to the employments and enjoyments of heaven. *Because without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*

Did *Paul*, for instance, believe in Jesus? It was under the consideration of himself, as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and the chief of sinners. Did he rejoice in hope? It was, as having received the atonement; as bearing the image of Christ; and as having a spiritual relish for heavenly things. The *sinner* believes: the believer *hopes*.

Nor can any man believe in Christ, and *continue* a rebel against God: for sovereign mercy, when it relieves the conscience, alters the bias of the heart, and forms the character anew. God, in the exercise and manifestation of pardoning grace to rebels, makes them his friends. Thus divine goodness leads to repentance,

consciences, what you have read or heard, saying to you, as *Nathan* to *David*, "Thou art the man?" The Lord dwells with those, in the manifestations of his favour, who tremble at his word; who hear and read it with holy awe, humble reverence, and godly fear. Has this been your case? Has the word of God dwelt on your hearts with abiding efficacy and energy? It is heard and read by many others, but it dwells in them that believe, and works effectually in them. This is an indication of special favour.

Do you experience the gracious operations of the blessed Spirit in the private exercises of religion? How do you find it with you in the duties of prayer, meditation, and self-examination? What humiliation for sin, what elevation of desire, of hope and trust, do you experience from time to time? If we are interested in the divine favour, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, making intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what

repentance, to holiness, and to hope of everlasting happiness. There is forgiveness with God that he may be feared.

This subject is very judiciously handled in *Mr. Booth's Glad Tidings to perishing Sinners*.

what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. The drawing, the melting, and invigorating influences of the Spirit, in your retired moments, are unknown to men, but they are known to him with whom you have to do; and most certainly they ought to be reckoned among the tokens of his favour.

Are you abidingly impressed with a sense of the excellence and the beauty of holiness? Is the religion of Jesus, amidst all the difficulties and trials which attend it, that which you most sincerely and heartily approve? Do you chuse to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin which are but for a season? Though you are often in heaviness through manifold temptations, yet perhaps there are seasons when wisdom's ways are attended with pleasantness and peace to your souls. The truths and promises of the gospel are the joy and rejoicing of your hearts. Surely these are indications of favour. It is not thus with those whose minds are alienated from the life of God.

You perhaps experience, at some seasons, gracious and comfortable returns of prayer. In darkness, trouble, and perplexity, you have poured out your complaint before God, and he has wrought

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out deliverance for you. Let not these instances of divine favour be overlooked. "In the day when I cried," says the Psalmist, "thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. I called upon the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me out of my distresses." The tokens of divine favour have been granted to you when you have been seeking them, by prayers, and tears, and humiliations. The gracious promises of the God of truth have thus been accomplished in your behalf, so that you have been constrained to say, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word."

You can, perhaps, recollect some happy seasons when the Lord has manifested himself to you with such clear discoveries of his special love, as that you could not then doubt of your interest in it. The Holy Spirit brought his own evidence along with him, bearing witness with your spirits that you were the children of God, so that you could say, with humble confidence, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." The Lord was ready to save you when your heart was fainting, and your flesh failing; his satisfying comforts came in so seasonably, as to bring you back, as it were, from the gates of death. When you were saying, "Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean

gone for ever? Will he be favourable no more?" You have then, in the hour of your extremity, experienced, that he has turned your darkness into day; he has put off your sackcloth, and girded you with gladness. The effects of these manifestations gave evidence to you whence they proceeded. For if the king's favour is as dew upon the grass, the favour of the King of kings must have a kindly influence on the heart to draw it to himself, and to make the soul fruitful in his ways.

This leads me to ask you, What is your behaviour towards God? When indulged with tokens of his love, do you welcome them, prize them, and bear them in remembrance? We pay great attention to the tokens of love which we receive from our earthly friends. Their gifts are laid up among our choicest treasures. We put a high value on the least expressions of regard from those whom we sincerely love. Surely then we should be greatly affected with every indication of our Redeemer's favour, and say to him, "Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate

tate on thee in the night-watches; because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." *

After such gracious manifestations of divine favour, are you excited to watchfulness and circumspection? A person who travels in a strange country, having rich jewels, and other valuable articles in his possession, is constantly on his guard, lest he should be robbed of his treasure. Do you proceed with the same caution, lest sin, Satan, or a deluding world should deprive you of your spiritual comforts? What *Ezra* says, in respect to

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* *John* was called *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. And where will heraldry, among all her boasted titles of honour, find one that can stand in competition with that which was conferred upon him? He was beloved of Jesus, who was himself the beloved of the Father. Could we suppose a prince to reign universal monarch over all the kingdoms of the world, the sole fountain of every kind of earthly honour to every individual man under the whole heavens, how gladly, at the hour of death, would he resign all, to be the beloved disciple of such a Master? And if nothing be esteemed too high a price for the favour of an earthly sovereign, a man, whose breath is in his nostrils, how should we value the love of him who abideth for ever, and will make us partakers of his own immortality!

Bp. Horne's sermon on *The beloved Disciple*.

the *Israelites* in general, may be justly referred to in this case; "And now, for a little space, grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage; should we again break his commandments, would he not be angry with us?"

Do you endeavour to comfort others with the comforts wherewith you have been comforted of God? Do you speak well of his name? Do you tell of his salvation from day to day, among such as are likely to profit by the relation? Are you saying, "Come and hear, ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul?"

Do these instances of divine favour make you long for the heavenly state, where you shall be in no danger of offending God, or of being deprived of the light of his countenance? Do you love and long for the Redeemer's appearance? Is the language of your soul like that of holy men of old, 'When shall I come and appear before God in Zion! How long shall I dwell in *Mesech*, and sojourn in the tents of *Kedar*? When shall I be in the presence of my Saviour, where there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore! When shall I behold his face in righteousness, awake in his likeness, and be satisfied!

fied! I shall then know that in his favour is life. If it be so delightfully transporting to taste that he is gracious here below, what will it be to dwell with him for ever above! In my flesh shall I see God, in the person of his Son, not through a glass darkly, but face to face. O blessed day! When shall it dawn; when my willing soul shall take her flight above the sun, the moon, and the starry lamps of heaven, into the immediate presence of my Saviour!

Come love, come life, and that blest day
For which I languish, come away!

But let me farther ask you, What is your behaviour towards God, in the general course of your life? If you are the beloved of God, and called to be saints, some evidence of this must appear, both in the frame of your spirits, and in your outward conversation. Are you afraid of doing any thing that may grieve the Holy Spirit? Do you hate sin, and fly from it, because it is offensive to the Most High? When temptations to that which is evil present themselves, do you repel them like *Joseph*, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God!" Do you reverence the commands of Zion's King, endeavouring to yield obedience to them, and making it the constant care and business

ness of your lives to cleave to God with full purpose of heart, and to walk worthy of him who has called you to his eternal kingdom and glory? Can you say with the apostle *Paul*, "Herein do I exercise myself so as to have always a conscience void of offence, both towards God, and towards men?"*

Do you daily wait upon God in all those ways and ordinances where he has promised to meet his children, and to afford his gracious presence? Do you seek to enjoy him in the use of the appointed means?

* 'If the Son of God became the Son of man, why should it seem a thing incredible, that the sons of men should become the sons of God? Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory; for we shall see him as he is.'

'To a christian the advice of the philosopher comes with redoubled force; 'Reverence yourself.' Consider to whom you are related, by whom you have been begotten again to a lively hope of an unfading inheritance. The stock from which you are sprung is noble, it is royal, it is divine. Disgrace it not by base and unworthy actions. Your inheritance is with the saints in light; have no fellowship with the works of darkness. Let your education be suitable to your birth, your conduct answerable to your expectations.'

Bp. Horne's Sermon on *The Word Incarnate*.

means? And are you dissatisfied when you have not nearness to God, and communion with him in those means? He who looks for his felicity in the divine favour is ready to say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. When thou saidest, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger; thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." If this be your case, you will be troubled when your heavenly Father withholds the light of his countenance, and suspends the comfortable sense of his favour. You will lay it deeply to heart, and say, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit."

What is the disposition of your minds towards those who are of the household of faith? Are those your favourites who appear to be interested in God's favour? Do you esteem those the excellent of the earth, and is your delight in them? Do you honour them that fear the Lord? Are they amiable in your eyes, because they bear the image of
of

of Christ, embrace his truth, obey his commands, and follow his example? "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Is the body of sin your greatest burden? Striving against it, weary of it, and groaning under it, do you cry, from time to time, with the holy apostle *Paul*, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Are you laying aside every weight, and the sin which easily besets you, that you may run with patience the race which is set before you? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness, forgetting the things behind, and reaching forth to the things before, do you press towards the mark for the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus? This is the disposition of those who are interested in the divine favour. "He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure."

Finally, do you love God, though you have some doubts respecting his love to you? Is he the object of your supreme desire, when you have no sensible experience of his favour? The woman of *Syrophénicia* followed Jesus when he seemed to flee from her; she renewed her request, and repeated her entreaties, when he appeared to be deaf to her cries, and to treat her with total neglect. She

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could not give up the point, though every thing seemed to make against her. This hath frequently been the case with those who are the objects of the divine favour. We find one saying, "My soul followeth hard after thee;" another, "Though I cry and shout, yet he shutteth out my prayer;" and a third, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." These are strong expressions of love to God, and, as such, evidences of interest in his favour.

Where shall the tribes of *Adam* find
The sov'reign good to fill the mind?
Ye sons of moral wisdom, show
The spring whence living waters flow.

Say, will the Stoic's flinty heart
Melt, and this cordial juice impart?
Could *Plato* find these blissful streams,
Amongst his raptures and his dreams?

In vain I ask; for nature's pow'r
Extends but to this mortal hour:
'Twas but a poor relief she gave
Against the terrors of the grave.

JESUS, our kinsman, and our GOD,
Array'd in majesty and blood,
Thou art our *Life*; our souls in thee
Possess a full felicity.

All

All our immortal hopes are laid
In thee our Surety and our Head ;
Thy cross, thy cradle, and thy throne,
Are big with glories yet unknown.

Let atheists scoff, and *Jews* blaspheme
Th' eternal life, and Jesus' name ;
A word of his almighty breath
Dooms the rebellious world to death.

But let my soul for ever lie
Beneath the favour of thine eye ;
'Tis heav'n on earth, 'tis heav'n above,
To see thy face, to taste thy love.

CHAP XII.

*The Subject farther improved, by Way of Instruction
and Exhortation.*

PERMIT me to address you, my dear fellow-sinner, who are resting satisfied with the common bounties of God's providence, without being concerned to know your interest in his special favour. The blessings you daily receive from the indulgent hand of the universal Parent of mankind, should excite in you earnest desires after those special tokens of his love, by which his peculiar people

people are distinguished from all others. God is good and kind to all. His tender mercies are over all his works. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil; but his own children are partakers of blessings of a more exalted nature than those which are bestowed on men in general. He blesteth them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things, in Christ Jesus. The Lord maketh his sun to shine promiscuously on the just and the unjust; but on those who fear his name, he causeth the Sun of righteousness to arise, with healing under his wings. To those who acknowledge him not, he gives rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness; but his salvation is nigh them that fear him. Can you be satisfied with the former without the latter? Do you crave nothing more at his hands than health and wealth, earthly honours and outward comforts? Do you not know, that many have had a large share of these things, who have lived without God in the world, died in their sins, and gone down to the regions of darkness? *Dives* fared sumptuously every day; but what was his end? He died, he was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes. *

It

* The fading nature of all those things on which worldly men place their affections, is set forth to us in

It is recorded concerning *Martin Luther*, that he used to say, 'I will not be put off with a worldly portion.' And is such a portion all that you desire?

Sup-

in the scriptures, under the expressive image of a dream. A dream is fleeting and transitory, a whole night passeth away in it as one hour, or one moment, since, during sleep, we have no idea of the succession of time. "Knowest thou not this of old," says *Zophar*, in the book of *Job*, "since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung; they who have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found; yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night."

"How are they brought into desolation," says *David*, "as in a moment; they are utterly consumed with terrors! As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, shalt thou make their image to vanish." Such a state of delusion is the state of the world; so vain, so incoherent, so transitory, are the schemes and designs of worldly men. And however important they may appear to the projectors of them, at the time, yet most certain it is, that what the scripture saith of *Pharaoh*, may be said with equal truth of every man when he comes to die, whose chief thought and care have been taken up about the things of this world, "He awoke, and, behold, it was a dream!"

Supposing your wishes were gratified with riches in abundance, houses and lands, and all manner of earthly prosperity; what would all these avail in that awful hour which is approaching, when your soul must be summoned to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ? Will the superior advantages you have enjoyed in this world procure you favour in that court? Will the Judge supreme be a respecter of persons, regarding the rich more than the poor? No; all worldly distinctions will then be over. Little do those consider this, who are eagerly grasping after what the scriptures call filthy lucre, and violating conscience to acquire it. But let them know, that "as the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool."

Let me entreat you, reader, to direct your aims to something higher than such a portion as a man may possess in this world, and yet be miserable in the next. Look, with earnest solicitude, for that of which death cannot deprive you. "Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." In the favour of God is life everlasting. "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." His fa-

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vour

your indeed will sweeten and season all outward enjoyments. To the wicked God says, "I will even curse your blessings, yea, I have cursed them already." But to his own children, every creature of God is good, being sanctified with the word of God, and prayer. What a happiness is it, when a man, by temporal enjoyments, as by the cords of love, is drawn nearer to the Giver of all good.

Learn to form a proper estimate of the outward blessings of providence, and not to over-rate them. Surely you must be sensible that the enjoyment of God, the love of Christ, and the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, together with the blessings of pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and an eternal weight of glory, are infinitely preferable to any thing of a worldly nature. There is no room for comparison here. The things which are seen are but temporal, but those which are not seen are eternal. Elevate your thoughts, extend your desires, and stretch the pinions of your souls above the perishable enjoyments of this transitory world; seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you, so far as to infinite wisdom may seem best for you. *

To

* A crown of everlasting glory is not surely such a trifle as to be thrown away on a careless creature, who

To excite you to what we are now recommending, the examples of the best and wisest men that ever lived upon earth are set before you. *Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Moses, Joshua, Samuel and David*; all the holy prophets, patriarchs and apostles; the noble army of martyrs and confessors; the great cloud of witnesses with which we are compassed about, renounced this world, and looked for their felicity in God's favour. Nor were they disappointed; they are now triumphing in his blissful presence above. Be you a follower

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of

who will not in good earnest pursue it. Though it is freely given, yet that we may not foolishly dream of enjoying it in the midst of a course of indolence and sloth, we are expressly told in the word of God, that "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." And we are therefore exhorted to strive, with the greatest intenseness and eagerness of mind, as the word properly signifies, to enter in at the strait gate, for this great and important reason, because many shall, another day, seek to enter in, and shall not be able. Nay, when our Lord makes the most gracious promises to the humble petitioner, he does it in such a manner, as to exclude the hopes of those who are careless and indifferent. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." If therefore you do not ask, seek and knock, how can you expect the door of mercy to be opened unto you?

of them who through faith and patience do now inherit the promises. Were the glorified saints in heaven to address you, would they not, with one voice, invite you to follow them? Would they not say, "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore?" They never repented of the happy choice they were enabled to make, when on earth they preferred the light of God's countenance to the increase of corn, of wine, and of oil; when they esteemed all the most flattering prospects the world can afford but dross and dung, in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

The *Bereans* are styled *noble*, for their ready reception of that gospel which shews how sinners are reconciled to God, through the death of his Son. Men of a noble spirit aspire after great things; and what honour can be compared with that of friendship with the King of kings? The ministers of the gospel, with one voice, pray you, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. Your godly neighbours and pious relations wish this for you above every thing else. The constant study and endeavour of those who hold forth unto you the word of life, is to bring you to God. This is the end of their prayers and their preaching. They travail in birth with you, till Christ be formed in you. They would

would think their toils sufficiently rewarded, if sinners were brought to repentance, and engaged in seeking the divine favour, with their whole hearts. They are willing to spend and be spent; if they may but, in so doing, win souls to God. As friends of the Bridegroom, they would rejoice greatly in the betrothing of sinners to him.

To the examples of the best of men, to the earnest solicitude of relations, to the prayers, the tears, the entreaties and persuasions of ministers, we may add the voice of the dying. Reader, could you be present with all those who lie on beds of languishing, and hear the cautions and counsels of enlightened souls, who are just going to launch forth into the eternal world, while capable of expressing their sentiments, to what would they call your immediate and earnest attention? What would they recommend to you, as most worthy of your pursuit? Would they not all, as with one voice, cry, 'Make it your care to mind the one thing needful, to know Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Make it your care to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; to fly for refuge to the hope set before you; to give diligence to make your calling and election sure; to renounce the world, with all its deluding vanities and vexatious cares; to look after the everlasting welfare of your soul, with ear-

nest and unwearied solicitude, that you may know your interest in the divine favour, and be made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light ?' *

If

* ' What if to the testimony of the dying, we could add that of the dead ? What if God were to turn aside the veil which separates between us and the invisible world, and to permit the most careless sinner among us to converse for a few moments with the inhabitants of it ? If you were to apply yourself to a happy spirit, that trode the most thorny road to paradise, or passed through the most fiery trial, and to ask him, " Was it worth your while to labour so much, and to endure so much for what you now possess ? " Surely, if the blessed in heaven were capable of indignation, it would move them to hear that it should be made a question.

' And, on the other hand, if you could inquire of one tormented in that flame below, though he might once be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day, if you could ask him, " Whether his former enjoyments were any equivalent for his present sufferings and despair ? " What answer do you suppose he would return ? Perhaps an answer of so much horror and rage, as you would not be able so much as to endure. Or if the malignity of his nature should prevent him from returning any answer at all, surely there would be a language even in that silence, a language in the darkness, and flames, and groans of that infernal prison, which would speak

to

If none of these will prevail with you, let me entreat you to consider the great end of the Redeemer's coming into the world. Was it not to seek and to save that which was lost? Did he not die, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God? Was he not lifted up upon the cross, that he might draw all men unto him? Why was he a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief? Why did he agonize in the garden of *Gethsemane*, and sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground? Why was he stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted? Why was he bound with cords, scourged with rods, crowned with thorns, blindfolded, spit upon, and buffeted? Why was he led as a lamb to the slaughter? Why was he nailed to the cross? And why did he there offer up himself without spot to God?

Was

to your very soul what the word of God is, with equal certainty, though less forcible conviction, speaking to your ear, that *one thing is needful*. You see it is so in the judgment of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, of the wisest and best of men, of many, who seemed to judge most differently of it, when they come to more serious and deliberate thought, and not only of the dying, but of the dead too, of those who have experimentally known both worlds, and most surely know what is to be preferred.'

Dr. Doddridge's sermon on *the Care of the Soul*.

Was not all this that he might gain the hearts of sinners to himself, and procure their peace, their pardon, their reconciliation to God, and their everlasting salvation? And is this of no weight with you? Are you still unmoved, still secure?

Shall I remind you, how intent the men of the world are to obtain the favour of their fellow-creatures? Many will entreat the favour of the prince, and seek after the notice and regard of him that giveth gifts. The tenant is solicitous for the goodwill of his landlord, on whom he is dependent. Inferiours covet the notice of their superiors, and sometimes seek to obtain it by obsequiously crouching to their capricious humours, and by base compliances with their unreasonable requisitions. The object of this solicitude is unworthy the pursuit. If it could be gained, where would be the advantage? "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." But the favour of God is life; his smile is felicity; his frown is destruction. Heaven and earth tremble before him when once he is angry. His displeasure may make us miserable for ever; but the light of his countenance will constitute the objects of it completely and eternally happy. Who then would be unconcerned about friendship with him? Surely every

every man, who wears out his life in seeking the regard or the honour which comes from men, walketh in a vain shew; surely they are disquieted in vain: but now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.

Who would be content to live for one hour in a state of uncertainty, with regard to the favour of his Maker and supreme Judge? It is strange that men can pursue the business and relish the pleasures of life, without the least solicitude about the matter under consideration. They regard not him who hath directed us to embrace his Son Jesus Christ, by believing in his name, as our only deliverer from the wrath to come. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." If you are in a state of impenitence and unbelief, how do you know but this day, this night, or this hour, you may be cut off in your sins, and sent to the place of punishment? "Because there is wrath, beware, lest he take you away with a stroke; and then a great ransom cannot deliver you." Do not say, I hope it will be otherwise. What reason have you for this hope, so long as you are totally regardless of the only way of safety? You are by nature a child of wrath even as others. He that believeth
not,

But while I would warn you against that deceitful hope which only serves to lull you to security in a state of sin, I would caution you against drawing the fatal conclusion, that there is no hope for you. You are yet alive, yet on the ground of mercy. The glad tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ are published in your ears. It is to you that wisdom calls; her voice is to the sons of men. To you is the declaration made, "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely." The door of mercy is not yet shut. The golden sceptre is still held forth. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation. To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart." When once life is gone, in vain will sinners cry for mercy, and seek for favour. In vain will they then say, Lord, Lord, open to us. When once the Master of the house hath risen up, and shut the door, it will never be opened again. The disease will then be absolutely incurable, the state of the sinner entirely hopeless, and the soul undone to all eternity. All opportunity will then be past. The thought of this is awful beyond all that language can express.

But, my dear fellow-sinner, this is not your case. Mercy's sparing hand hath yet upheld you, and the divine proclamation is still made to you,
"Let

“ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” But the case admits not of one moment’s delay. How stands your heart affected ? If in sincerity you now begin to cry for mercy, there is not barely a possibility of your obtaining it, but an absolute certainty. “ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you. Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” The Lord of life and glory hath said it, and his word is the truth itself. He will never falsify it.

Beware then of saying with those hardened in despair, “ There is no hope, no ; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.” Let the proclamations of divine mercy melt you to penitence, encourage you to believe, and excite you to pray. There is mercy for the chief of sinners. Of this *Manasseh* is an instance, *Paul* is a pattern, and *Magdalene* an example. Let God’s forbearance and long-suffering lead you to repentance. Approach to a forgiving God, through the death of his Son, and make trial whether he will not be as good as his word. Think on the resolution of the servants of *Benhadad* ; “ We have heard that the king of *Israel* is a merciful king : let us put sack-

cloth

king of *Israel* is a merciful king: let us put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of *Israel*; peradventure he will save our lives." You have better ground of encouragement than they had. "For the Lord our God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return unto him."

Perhaps some one of my readers may be disposed to say, 'I look upon the favour of God as a most desirable privilege, and am using my best endeavours to obtain it.' In reply to this I would beg leave to tell you, that I am afraid you do not consider the subject in a proper light. Do you imagine that the privilege you mention is to be procured by your endeavours? That it is to be purchased by any efforts or exertions of your own? Whoever does, by his own righteousness, seek to recommend himself to the favour of his Maker, betrays great ignorance of the gospel system, and attempts that which the scriptures declare to be impossible to man in his degenerate state. For "by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight." *

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* He who promises himself he shall obtain acceptance with his Maker, by keeping the law, acts like

The favour of God is absolutely and divinely free. Yet the sacred writers every where recommend the use of proper means, to those who desire to flee from the wrath to come. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and

like the country-man mentioned by the poet, who, being unable to ford the river, took up a resolution to wait on the banks, till the stream had all run by;

— At ille

Labitur, et labetur in omne volubilis ævum.

Vain man, desist; such flatt'ring hopes forego:
It flows, and flows, and will for ever flow.

"Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? *Οτι ουκ εκ πισews*, because they sought it not in the way of faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone." Rom. ix. 31, 32.

and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

———— Then prostrate fall

Before him reverent, and there confess

Humbly your faults, and pardon beg, with tears

Wat'ring the ground, and with your sighs the air

Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign

Of sorrow' unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.

MILTON.

Let me, in the first place, recommend unto you self-reflection, as necessary, in order to come to a just knowledge of your state. Seriously commune with your own heart, and think on your ways. To this exercise sinners in general are extremely reluctant, and therefore they go on in security, without any prevailing concern about their eternal interests. They are like a man in a state of intoxication, who scarcely knows what he does, and who never reflects on the malignity of his actions, or the dangers to which he exposes himself. Without serious consideration, there is, humanly speaking, no hope of a sound conversion. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet to thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." When the Psalmist predicts the conversion of the Gentile nations, he says, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto

the Lord." They shall recollect the actions of their past lives, they shall call to mind their own evil ways; they shall consider their state, as sinners against God, and ask themselves, what they are doing, whither their courses tend, and what will become of them to all eternity. They have perhaps till this hour been wholly inattentive to these things. They have forgotten God their Maker, forgotten what ought to have been their principal business in this world, and for what purpose they were brought on the stage of existence. Before this period of reflection and serious consideration, men in seeing see not, in hearing they hear not, neither do they understand, and therefore God's first work upon their hearts is to awaken and rouse them from their security; "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The prodigal first came to himself, and then said, "I will arise, and go to my father." The Almighty's address to our first parent after the fall was, "*Adam*, where art thou?" This is the general method he is pleased to take with those whom he brings to repentance. "They shall remember, and turn unto the Lord."

Let me then entreat you to ask yourselves these serious questions, 'Am I in a state of acceptance with God, or have I lived till this hour as one
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alienated from him? The special favour of the Maker of the universe is not enjoyed by every man. I myself, by nature, am a child of wrath; but have I experienced a change from nature to grace? Am I in a converted state? Do I bring forth fruits meet for repentance? What evidence can I produce of my being interested in God's pardoning love? I am commanded to examine myself, whether I be in the faith, and to prove my own self, whether Jesus Christ be in me, by the renewing operations of his Holy Spirit. To be at uncertainties in a matter of such moment is dangerous; and it would be still more awful to deceive myself, and to think myself something when I am nothing.

' If I am not in a state of friendship with God, my condition is awfully dangerous, and should I continue in it, surely it had been better I had never been born. For if I should die in such a state, I must be miserable for ever; and how do I know but this night my soul may be required of me? Even in this life, if I am not reconciled to God, woe is me; for his righteous law condemns me, and his wrath abideth on me. The condition of the meanest brute, or of the vilest reptile, is preferable to mine, for they have never offended their Maker, or provoked him to anger; but he is "angry with the wicked every day." In such a case,

S 3 how

how is it possible for a man to be happy, either in this world or the next !

‘ But what is the procuring cause of God’s displeasure? What are the grounds of the quarrel betwixt him and his creatures? Whence came this distance between him and my poor soul? Surely there must be a cause. That God, whose creature I am, and with whom I have to do, is so holy, so just and righteous, that he cannot but hate sin, that evil thing by which I am defiled. It belongs to the perfection of his nature to be displeased with it. I read in his sacred word, that he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that he cannot look on iniquity. Let me consider this. When it is said that he cannot look on iniquity, it must signify the most inconceivable detestation of it. He cannot connive at it, he cannot spare it; because to do so would be contrary to the holiness of his nature. He can do every thing which is not contrary to himself, to the essential properties of his nature; but I may be fully assured, that he can do nothing which is contrary to his truth, his holiness, or his righteousness; nothing inconsistent with these his adorable perfections.

‘ Is it not on this ground, that the purity of God is sometimes expressed by jealousy? For the nature of jealousy is not to spare. Nothing but the executing of vengeance will satisfy it. Is not this
what

what the Almighty intended in the revelation of himself which he made to *Moses*, "Who will by no means clear the guilty?" Does not this mean, that he will not clear them without satisfaction made to his injured justice and holiness? Is it not said, that, to sinners as such, "Our God is a consuming fire?" Did not the controversy between him and his creatures commence with the first transgression? Is not the breach perpetually widened by the commission of actual sins? Our iniquities have separated between us and our God; they have concealed his face and favour from us, and provoked his wrathful indignation.* But

* 'There can be no right judgment made of the nature and demerit of sin, without a due consideration of the nature and holiness of HIM against whom it is committed. Nothing, therefore, will state our thoughts aright concerning the guilt and demerit of sin, but a deep consideration of the infinite greatness, holiness, righteousness, and power of God. To which we may add, that God, in dealing with sinners, acts not as to the *effects* of these properties of his nature, but on a preceding contempt of his bounty, grace, and mercy; as it is impossible that sin should come into the world but by the contempt of these; for, antecedently to all possibility of sinning, God communicates the effects of his goodness and bounty to the creation; and in reference to those sins which are against the gospel, the effect of his grace and mercy.

This

‘ But let me consider, How can I hope for reconciliation with the offended Majesty of heaven? Will the Lord be pacified by my prayers, by my tears, by my resolution to perform new obedience, or by my actual endeavours to discharge the duties incumbent upon me? Will the fire of God’s displeasure be quenched by any sufferings, or any sorrows of mine? Alas! there is nothing in any of these sufficient to satisfy for my past offences. Could I, from this moment to the end of life, perfectly keep the law, without offending in any one point, by thought, word, or deed, this would only be performing immediate duty; it would be no payment of the past debt.’

What then, my dear fellow-sinner, is there no remedy? In the writings of *Moses* I find the institution of sacrifices. Living creatures were, according to divine appointment, presented before God; their blood was shed, and their flesh was consumed by fire upon the altar. These sacrifices certainly must respect sin, and an atonement to be made

This is that which will give us a due measure of the guilt and demerit of sin. We are to look upon it as a contempt of infinite goodness, bounty, grace, and mercy: and as rising up against infinite greatness, holiness, righteousness and power. Then we shall view it as it is.—*Dr. Owen, on Heb. x. 30.*

made for it. What other end could be designed by the effusion of blood in the service of the living God? But it was impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should *really* take away sin. This however is done by the blood of Jesus Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God. We were by nature the enemies of God, and children of wrath. Millions of actual transgressions had exposed us still more to his awful indignation. If peace and reconciliation were not made for us, we could not expect to be accepted of him, or to receive any token of favour from him. *

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* 'It was a great work to make peace with God for sinners, to make atonement for sin, and establish our reconciliation with God. This doctrine is the life and spirit of our religion, the centre wherein all the lines of it meet. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those persons by whom a constant consideration of this is neglected, are strangers to the animating spirit of that religion which they outwardly profess. And therefore Satan employs all his artifices to divert the minds of men from a due attention to it. To this cause we ascribe much of the devotion of the *Romanists*, which effectually draws off the mind, not only from a spiritual contemplation of the excellency of Christ's offering, and its glorious benefits, but also from the

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The Sovereign of the universe designed to manifest his righteousness, his grace, his love, and his wisdom in the substitution of his only begotten Son in our room, that he might suffer and die for our sins, the just for the unjust, and so bring us to God. "He set forth Jesus to be a propitiation, to declare his righteousness." The righteousness

rational comprehension of the truth of the doctrine concerning what he did and suffered.

On the other hand, the Socinians please themselves and deceive others with a vain imagination that there was no such work to be done. If we may believe them, there was no atonement to be made for sin, no expiatory sacrifice to be offered, no peace thereby to be made with God, no compensation to his justice, by answering the sentence and curse of the law due to sin. But surely, if they had not an unpardonable mixture of confidence and dexterity, they could not find out evasions against so many express divine testimonies as are directly opposite to their fond imagination, even tolerably to satisfy their own minds; or to suppose that any man can with patience bear the account they must give of the agency, the prayers, the tears, the cries, the fears, the wrestling, and the travail of the soul of Christ, on their supposition. But we may pass them over at present, as enemies of the cross of Christ; namely, of that cross whereby he made peace with God for sinners.

Others

of God was most eminently glorified in the reconciliation wrought out by the Mediator, when he made an atonement for us by his blood. Herein also is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for

‘ Others there are, who by no means approve of any diligent inquiry into these mysteries. Our whole duty, according to them, is to be conversant in morality: but as for this fountain of grace; this basis of eternal glory; this demonstration of divine wisdom, holiness, righteousness and love; this great discovery of the purity of the law, and of the vileness of sin; this first, great, principal subject of the gospel, and motive of faith and obedience; this root and cause of all peace with God; of all sincere and uncorrupted love towards him; of all joy and consolation from him—they think it scarcely deserves a place among the objects of their contemplation. But such as are admitted into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, will not so easily part with their immortal interest therein. I fear not indeed to say, that he is likely to be the best, the most humble, the most holy and fruitful christian, who is most diligent in spiritual inquiries into this great mystery of reconciliation by the blood of the cross, and in the exercise of faith about it. Nor is there any such powerful mean of preserving the soul in a constant abhorrency of sin, and watchfulness against it, as a due apprehension of what it cost the Son of God to make atonement for it.’—*Dr. Owen, on Heb. v. 7.* abridged by *Dr. Williams.*

for our sins. The grace of the gospel is summed up in this, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Here then, reader, is the divine remedy, proposed in every page of the blessed gospel. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Those who deny the doctrine of reconciliation, as has been justly observed by a judicious writer, are at once enemies to the salvation of men, to the honour of Christ, and to the glory of God. From men they take away, as far as lies in their power, all ground of hope, of peace, and of happiness; from Christ, his office and honour; and from God, his grace and glory. Let such go with their sophisms to men who were never burdened with a sense of guilt, who never were awakened to just apprehensions of divine wrath on account of their offences, who never trembled at God's threatening word, and the sentence of his righteous law, who never cried out in the bitterness and anguish of their souls, "What must I do to be saved? Where-with shall I come before the Lord, and bow before the high God?" *They* may perhaps hearken to the fine things which may be said to them, about recommending themselves to the favour of God by virtue, probity, and a benevolent temper. They have no need of the physician, for they are not sick.

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sick. They have no need of healing, for they are not broken in heart. But those who are ready to perish, like the *Israelites* stung by the fiery flying serpents, and on the point of expiring under the deadly wound, see the need of that remedy which God has provided.

Sinner, beware, if any thing but the blood of the cross give ease to thy guilty conscience, it is but like an opiate, which may stupify for a short season, but will not work a cure.

Hence the necessity of a living faith in the divine Redeemer, in order to the enjoyment of God's favour. Faith is that gracious power of the mind, whereby it firmly believes what is revealed, upon the sole authority of God the revealer, as the fountain of all truth. As the human mind acts naturally by its reason, in receiving those truths which are natural and suited to its capacity; so when renewed through the power of the Spirit, it acts spiritually by faith, in receiving truths which are spiritual and supernatural. Believing consists not in a mere assent to the truth of the objects, but in such a reception of them, as gives them a real subsistence in the soul. And it is this in-being of the things believed which produces the immediate effects of a living faith; namely, love, joy, peace,

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and spiritual obedience to the divine commands. *

This distinguishes the faith of the operation of God from every other kind of faith. The temporary persuasions of some men give no subsistence to

* The apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, that faith is *Ελπιζομενων υποστασις*, the *substance* or *subsistence* of things hoped for; such a firm persuasion of the truth believed, as gives it a kind of subsistence in the mind. Hence the truth is said to *dwell* in the man who rightly understands and receives it; and Christ *dwells* in his heart by faith. The same word *υποστασις* is rendered *confidence*, in Heb. iii. 14. The objects believed, *the things hoped for*, have a *subsistence* in the mind of the believer, and *abide* in him in their power and efficacy, so as to answer all the ends of his spiritual life; to purify his heart, and to change and transform his whole soul into the image of God.

Faith, in the farther description of it, is said to be *ελεγχος*, the demonstrating or convincing evidence of things not seen. It is such a demonstration of them as carries with it a confutation of all objections against their real existence. By "things not seen," we are to understand all those things which, though not proposed to our outward senses, ought to influence our constancy and perseverance in the ways of religion; namely, God himself; his eternal existence; the adorable perfections of his nature; the person, atonement and grace of Christ; together with all spiritual, heavenly and eternal things, which God has pro-

to the things believed in their minds, so as to be productive of proper effects. There is no real image or reflection of the things they profess to believe made upon their souls. The death of Christ, for instance, or Christ crucified, is proposed to our faith in the blessed gospel. The proper effect

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promised in his word, but which are not yet actually enjoyed. It hath been observed by many learned men, that the word *ελεγχος*, used by the apostle, and translated evidence, signifies a strict proof, or demonstration; it is such a kind of evidence as both convinces the understanding, and engages a man to act according to that conviction. Dr. Doddridge's paraphrase on the latter clause of the verse in question, is very just: 'Faith is the powerful *conviction of things* which are *not seen*, but of the certainty and importance of which there is such a full persuasion, that they act upon the mind, in a great measure, as if they were present.'

This definition of faith is general, and relates to its efficacy through the whole of our christian course, as is evident from the instances produced, to exemplify it, in the following parts of the chapter. It describes the faith by which a just man lives and walks, by which he overcomes all enemies, all difficulties, and all opposition in his way to the kingdom. But that particular notion of faith which relates to a sinner's looking to Jesus for the remission of his sins, the justification of his person, and his acceptance with God, is certainly included. See Hebrews xi. 1.

of true faith in this object, is to destroy sin, to crucify, or to mortify it in us. But where it is only apprehended by a superficial or temporary faith, this effect will not be produced in the soul. Sin will retain its dominion, notwithstanding the profession which the man makes of faith in Christ. He only who believes in Jesus with the heart unto righteousness, becomes dead to sin, so as not to live any longer therein. He receives the word of promise, revealing Christ and his atonement, so as to give it a real admittance into his mind and heart, to abide and dwell there, as in its proper place. It is in him the ingrafted word which is able to save the soul. Or, to use another allusion, it transforms his whole mind into a new state, as the form of wax is changed by the impression of a seal into the image of the seal itself. Christ crucified, we have said, is the principal subject of the gospel. He himself tells us, that he is the bread that came down from heaven; that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed. Faith is the eating of this provision. As, in eating, the food is received, and by digestion turned into the very substance of the body, so the divine word is received by faith, and having a subsistence in the soul, produceth the happy fruits of righteousness; for the truth "worketh effectually in them that believe."

It

It is through this faith in the complete work of the Redeemer, that, being justified, we have peace with our offended Sovereign. The atonement, which is made for our sins by the blood of the cross, is no otherwise received than by faith. "We joy in God through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom we have now received the atonement." This faith is declared to be the gift of God.

He is pleased to engage the mind of the sinner to a diligent attention to the word preached. "Faith cometh by hearing." Hence the Author of eternal salvation says to us, "Hear, and your souls shall live." It is his usual method, in the conversion of sinners, to bring them under the sound of the gospel, and to engage them seriously to regard the messages of it. A blessing is therefore pronounced on those who watch daily at wisdom's gates, waiting at the posts of her doors. But a listless and indolent attendance in places of religious worship will be of little advantage. The minds of sinners, who are brought to believe, are therefore roused, and excited to take earnest heed to the words of everlasting life, by him who says unto them, "Hearken diligently unto me." They have before heard the most important truths with indifference, as if they were but idle tales, or cunningly devised fables; it is now otherwise. The arrows

of conviction begin to pierce their consciences, and penetrate their hearts. They regard what is spoken, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God. They are convinced that there is a sacred reality in religion; they are awakened to a sense of their own danger, and begin in good earnest to inquire after some way of escape.

The minds of such sinners are likewise further enlightened concerning the nature and necessity of true faith. They learn from the scriptures, that without faith it is impossible to please God; that there is no pardon of sin, no justification, no peace with the offended Majesty of heaven, without faith; that he who believeth not is condemned already, and, continuing in that state, shall surely be damned. Hence they are led to inquire, what that faith is which is so necessary to the salvation of the soul. And they are convinced that it must be something more than that lifeless assent to the truth of scripture doctrines of which thousands are possessed, who are alienated from the life of God, and continue the slaves of sin, of Satan, and of the world; who have no love to God, nor regard for holiness. They begin to see, that though they have always thought themselves to be believers, they have but deceived themselves; since none of the fruits of a living faith have been brought forth by them.

them. Hence they are convinced, that they have lived to that very day in a state of unbelief. It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God to convince men of sin, because they believe not on the name of Jesus.

Being convinced of unbelief, the awakened sinner becomes very solicitous that he may be the subject of that faith which is of the operation of God, which purifies the heart, works by love, overcomes the world, and has its issue in the full and everlasting salvation of the soul. 'Oh,' says he, 'that I could lay hold on the promises of life in Christ Jesus! O that I could so behold them as to be persuaded of them, and embrace them, with satisfactory acquiescence of mind in the truth of God, as to their accomplishment in my behalf! But I am like one swimming against the stream, and endeavouring to catch hold on that which, with all his efforts, he cannot reach. I sometimes cry, with the poor man in the gospel, *Lord, I would believe, help thou my unbelief.* Conscious guilt fills me with terror. I tremble before that God whose wrath I have so justly deserved. I feel something within continually upbraiding me with my past offences and present unworthiness, and telling me I ought not to derive encouragement from the promises of mercy, for I have neither part
nor

nor lot in them. I would look unto Jesus, that I may be saved, but my sins hang heavy on my heart, so that I am not able to look up. Yet I sometimes say, *Though he slay me, I will trust in him.* I have no where else to go. If the Saviour of sinners frown me away, I perish; for I know no other refuge. I am well assured, that he that findeth him, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But without an interest in him I am undone for ever.'

Having thus briefly shewn the necessity of faith in order to the enjoyment of God's favour, and suggested some hints concerning the way in which sinners are brought nigh to him, what shall I more say? I would encourage the poor soul whose case I have been describing, not to stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but to fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel. Remember that Jesus, the compassionate Saviour, hath said, "I will in no wise cast out."

Let the needy trembling sinner continue to cry earnestly to God for the manifestations of his pardoning grace and mercy. The same person who said, *In his favour is life*, had sought that privilege with diligence. "I entreated thy favour with my whole heart." Go thou, and do likewise. A sense of interest in his favour is worth seeking.

Cry

Cry earnestly for it, and be not content to have a denial. Pray always, and faint not. Take with you words and go unto him, ' Lord, I am a poor, forlorn outcast, a miserable, guilty creature; lift thou up upon me the light of thy countenance. Let me not be shut up in a dungeon of darknes, and lie in the shades of death. I know I might justly be banished from thee for ever. But though I deserve no favour, in Jesus Christ, thy Son, thou hast declared thyself well pleased. Did he not die, the just for the unjust, to bring sinners unto thee, and to deliver them from the wrath to come? Has he not opened a new and living way of access to thee? Did he not rise, as the Sun of righteousness, on this benighted world, with healing in his wings? Hath he not brought life and immortality to light? O thou who didst cause the light to shine out of darknes, shine into my heart, to give the light of the knowledge of thy glory, in the face of Jesus Christ.

* I read in thy holy word, that through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darknes, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Lord, look upon me in mercy, through thy dear Son; let the bowels of thy compassion be moved towards thy creature
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in misery, cast on me a pitying eye, and let thy hand of mercy help me in my distress. Be not a terror unto me, but speak a word of pardon, of peace, and of comfort to my poor soul; for thou only art my hope in the day of evil. I am not worthy to come into thy presence, loaded as I am with guilt, and covered with pollution; yet have mercy upon me according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Cast my sins behind thy back. Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Deal with me according to the favour which thou bearest unto thy people. O visit me with thy salvation.'

If this is your language, my dear reader, you are not far from the kingdom of God. Wait on the Lord, and he will save you; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for him. Be entreated, without delay, to make a full surrender of yourself to God. Present your body and your soul to him, as your reasonable service. Devote your whole self as a free-will offering to him, and he will receive you. Study his word, seek to know his will, and ask of him a right way. Take his yoke upon you, and wear it with delight. First give your own self unto the Lord, and then unto his church, according to his will, that you may walk in all his

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ordinances and commandments blameless. Make a willing profession of your subjection to the gospel of Christ. Be ready to say, I am the Lord's; dare to call yourself by the name of *Jacob*, and to subscribe with your hand to the Lord, and surname yourself by the name of *Israel*. Be sincere and hearty, warm and zealous in the business of religion. Let it be your uppermost concern to walk with God in humble reverence from day to day. Keep your heart with all diligence; practise continual self-denial; be sober, and watch unto prayer, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

Remember that Jesus has said, "If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." This is the way in which sinners are brought to enjoy a comfortable sense of the divine favour. The Lord will not grant the tokens of his favour in any other way than that of his own appointment. Go then to the house of God, inquire in his temple, attend to his ordinances, cast in your lot among those who constitute his family and household, shew your love to Jesus by keeping his commands; so may you expect to be "satisfied with favour, and to be full of the blessing of the Lord."

Thy

Thy favour I entreat,
 Thou God of love and grace,
 I bow before thy mercy-seat,
 And humbly seek thy face.

I'm vile, and self-abhorr'd,
 Polluted and unclean;
 Yet look in pity on me, Lord,
 And cleanse me from my sin.

O hearken to my cries,
 And set my spirit free;
 Thou, O my God, wilt not despise
 The heart that mourns for thee.

Thy well-beloved Son
 Hath shed his precious blood,
 T' atone for crimes which we have done,
 And bring us near to God.

Thy promis'd Spirit give,
 Thy saving grace impart;
 Help me in Jesus to believe
 With undivided heart.

O tell me thou art mine,
 My gloomy fears remove;
 Lord, let thy face upon me shine,
 And fill me with thy love.

Thy gracious smile afford,
 And seal me for thine own;
 For life is in thy favour, Lord,
 But death is in thy frown.

CHAP.

No. XVI

CHAP. XIII.

The subject concluded in an Address to the Objects of divine Favour.

I Shall now conclude, with an use of instruction, addressed more particularly to those who may be denominated the real saints of God; being brought out of darkness into his marvellous light, called with an holy calling, and made, by regenerating and adopting grace, the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. These are interested in the divine favour, according to the tenor of that covenant which is ordered in all things and sure, and contains all their salvation, and all their desire; the distinguishing privilege of which is, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." His favour towards them is, as *Davenant* observes, (*vinculum æternæ benevolentiae*) a bond of eternal love. This bond is indissoluble, and cannot be broken; for his love, like himself, is immutable, and everlasting.

But the sweet and comfortable sense of this love is not always enjoyed by those who in reality are interested in it. For we find some of those pious and holy men, whose experiences are recorded in the sacred scriptures, at certain seasons, complain-

ing of the absence of God, of the hidings of his face, of their being filled with great bitterness instead of peace, and with sorrow and anguish of spirit instead of comfort. It is to such as these that the God of grace and consolation has said, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempests and not comforted, for a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

SECT. I.

Of the Doubts and Scruples which some may entertain respecting their Interest in God's Favour.

Perhaps some person, who may cast his eyes on these pages, may be saying, with a desponding heart, 'Alas! I fear that I am not in a state of friendship with my Maker, though there is nothing in heaven or earth that I so much desire. How can I be in the favour of God who am so unworthy of it? A consciousness of my unworthiness bows down my soul before him from day to day.'

But can you forget that there is no worthiness in any of the human race to entitle them to the privilege in question? "There is none righteous, no
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not one." Neither does the Most High set his love upon any because they are worthy of it, but because of his own sovereign good pleasure. "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and compassion on whom he will have compassion." Nothing out of his own infinite mind is to be considered as a motive inducing him to it.

Those who have been distinguished with peculiar marks of favour from above, have had the deepest sense of their own unworthiness. *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, counted himself but dust and ashes. *Jacob*, who as a prince had power with God, who wrestled with the angel of the covenant, and prevailed, and who was favoured with the visions of the Almighty, even he, in deep humility of spirit, says, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." The Psalmist, who was guided with the counsel, and held by the right hand of the Most High, owns himself as a beast before him. *Paul*, who was caught up to paradise, who had abundance of revelations from the divine Redeemer, and the most intimate and astonishing manifestations of his favour, yet owns himself less than the least of all saints, and the very chief of sinners. If you look into the records of past generations;

you will find that the tokens of God's favour have descended most plentifully on those who have walked in the low vallies of humiliation; and that those have been most honoured of their Maker, who have had the meanest opinion of themselves. The pious *Roman* centurion said to the Redeemer, in whom the *Gentiles* trust, " Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, " Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in *Israel*!" When *Mary* the sinner wept at the feet of the Saviour, washing them with her tears, and wiping them with the hair of her head, he declared, in the presence of the haughty and disdainful pharisee, that her sins, which were many, were forgiven her. " For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Perhaps the person I am now addressing may say, ' But I am a vile, polluted, sinful wretch; how can a God of spotless purity have any favour for such an one as I am ?'

It is true, the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity; yea, he is of purer eyes than to look on evil. But we must distinguish be-

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tween the person of a poor unworthy sinner, and the defilement cleaving to him, which the sinner himself abhors, and from which he desires and seeks deliverance. If none were loved of God but such as are free from the stains of impurity, there could be no objects of his favour among the children of men. The love of God to sinners is in Christ Jesus our Lord; and he can distinguish between their persons and that whereby they are defiled. The spouse of Christ, though black in herself, is comely in the eyes of infinite purity, as viewed in her relation to the Lord her righteousness. The child of an earthly parent is dear to his father, though he has fallen into the mire. The child's tears on the occasion move the compassion of the father's heart, and he hastens to relieve him in his distress. When *Ephraim* was turned and repented; when he was instructed, and smote upon his thigh; when he was ashamed and confounded, because he did bear the reproach of his youth, was there no favour towards this penitent in the heart of him who is justly called "the Father of mercies?" Hear what he says; "Is *Ephraim* my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord."

Though God is unchangeable in his nature, and not subject to human passions, yet, in condescension to our infirmities, he is pleased to speak to us after the manner of men. He assures us, that his children, with all their imperfections, are dear to him. They are lovely and comely in his sight, through the comeliness of Christ which is put upon them. Their humiliations move him; their speech is pleasant to him; their prayers and cries are his delight; just as parents take pleasure in their children, who are images of themselves, particularly when they begin to talk, to lisp out their fathers' names, and, in broken language, to express their wants and their desires. The little actions of children, though full of simplicity and weakness, are pleasing to their parents; so are the imperfect motions of gracious affections to our heavenly Father. His bowels are troubled for them, and yearn towards them, when they are pouring out the tears of penitence before him, and mourning over their own follies. *Job* was regarded with peculiar approbation and favour, at the very time when he cried out, "Behold, I am vile;" when he abhorred himself in the sight of his Maker, and repented in dust and ashes before him. The Lord said to *Eliphaz the Temanite*, "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy

thy two friends;—my servant *Job* shall pray for you, for him will I accept."

Shame, confusion of face, and self-loathing are both fruits and evidences of God's favour. "That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God. I will accept you with your sweet favour, when I bring you out from the people; and ye shall remember your ways and all your doings wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight." May not the desponding reader take encouragement from such passages as these? Is it not evident that God's kindness is then most peculiarly excited towards a poor sinner, when he is most out of love with himself, and most vile in his own eyes? Have not the best of men in God's account, often thought themselves the worst? This to some may seem very mysterious. It is a paradox which divine revelation alone can explain.

But perhaps some one may be ready to ask farther, 'How can I be interested in the divine favour who have not the comfort of it, but have been, for a long time, beclouded with darkness, and overwhelmed with trouble and sorrow? Even to-day is my complaint bitter; my stroke is heavier than

than my groaning. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. Oh that I knew where I might find him!

You ought, my dear friend, to keep in mind the necessary distinction we have before made, between the favour of God, as it is in itself, and that sensible enjoyment of it which you now seem to want. We sometimes find the man after God's own heart expressing himself in such language as this, "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? For ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." Salvation may be experienced in its reality where the joy of it is wanting. And hence the same person thus prays, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." An earthly father may sometimes frown upon the child whom he dearly loves. *Joseph's* affection for his brethren was sincere, at the very time that he spake so roughly to them. The God of love and grace doth sometimes, for wise ends, suspend the manifestations of his

his favour from the heirs of salvation. A skilful physician prescribes to his patients, in some cases, such medicines as occasion pain and sickness, in order to remove those humours which might endanger the constitution. His intention is not to kill, but to cure. The circumstances of God's children are often such as call for fatherly chastisements. He therefore suspends his smiles, or withdraws the comfortable sense of his love and favour, leaving them, for a time, in darkness and disquietude. When *David* thought his mountain stood so strong, that, in a sort of blameable security, he concluded he should never be moved, he had presently reason to complain, "Thou hidest thy face, and I am troubled." Of ancient *Israel* the Lord said, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his own heart."

The Almighty may deal thus with the objects of his love, to rouse them from a state of security; to subdue pride, and make them humble; to wean them from the world, and excite in them more earnest longings after their heavenly rest; to teach them to put a higher value on his favour, and to quicken their diligence in seeking him; and, in a word, he deals thus with them, that they may learn

learn to sympathize with others who may be tried in the same way.

Give not up, therefore, all hope of interest in the divine favour, on account of your present disconsolate state. If you walk in darkness, and have no light, still trust in the name of the Lord, and stay yourself upon his powerful arm, and unchanging love. Remember, you are yet exposed on the tempestuous sea of life, and have not reached the port of uninterrupted rest. Your sun may be under a cloud, and not shine upon you, but he is still in the heavens. Careless sinners have no solicitude about God's favour; it is sincere love alone that is attended with jealousy. Fits of sickness are incident to those who are alive, not to the dead. They who are dead in trespasses and sins never mourn under a sense of God's absence. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, O you that hope in the Lord.

But perhaps some disquieted soul may say, How can I conclude that God looks upon me with an eye of favour, when I cannot bring my heart to love him, and delight in him, as his word requires me to do? Does not his love to sinners kindle in their hearts a return of affection to him? Do not I hear the heirs of salvation saying, "We love him, because he first loved us?"

To

To this I would answer;—spiritual life may be hid, even from the christian's own view, as well as from that of others. Desertions, temptations, and the prevailing corruptions of the heart may, for a time, so becloud the mind, that the evidences of grace cannot be clearly discerned. As the love of God to us may be concealed under a cloud of darkness, the same may be said with respect to our love to him. The principle may exist when the operation of it is not very apparent. You are afraid you do not love him whom you know to be worthy of your most ardent affection. But perhaps your judgment of yourself is not according to truth. Can you find no spark of love amidst the ashes which surround it? Examine yourself carefully. Though you cannot, with full confidence say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;" perhaps you can appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that you *desire* to love him. And can you suppose this to be the case with those who are entirely destitute of spiritual life? If unregenerate sinners sincerely desire to love God, and are disquieted, grieved, and distressed that they cannot love him as they ought, we will no longer affirm, that their minds are carnal, and enmity against their Maker and Sovereign. Instead therefore of concluding, that you are entirely destitute

titute of the gracious principle of which we are speaking, earnestly and constantly pray, that the holy flame of divine love may be so enkindled in your bosom, as to put the matter out of doubt respecting its existence there. Let it be your daily request at the throne of grace, that the love of God may be shed abroad in your heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto you.

But there is scarcely any end of the jealousies and fears of those who are weak in the faith. Methinks I hear one saying, 'You have not yet touched my fore; I am grievously afflicted in my own person, in my family, and in my circumstances; the hand of the Almighty is heavy upon me; if I am interested in his favour, why am I thus?' I would answer, in the words of the apostle, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." If fatherly chastisements are tokens of love, then great and heavy chastisements are tokens of great love. Health and prosperity are liberally granted to many who abuse them to the ruin of their souls; they may, on the other hand, be denied to you in great mercy. The father
knows

knows what is good for his child, and what might do him harm, better than the child himself knows. A man in a raging fever earnestly longs for strong drink; but his attendant with-holds it from him, because he knows it would increase his disorder, and perhaps endanger his life. The attendant denies what is requested, out of love to the afflicted man. God is our faithful keeper, and merciful preserver. He is infinitely wise to know what is best for us, and what would be to our hurt. As a proof of his favour, he often does us good, in some sort, against our wills. It is a mercy to be sometimes refused what we eagerly wish, rather than to have our fond desires gratified. Remember it is said of the rebellious *Israelites*, who asked meat for their lust, "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls." This gift was a mark of displeasure, rather than of favour.

The last case I shall mention, is that of the tempted christian. 'If I am interested in the divine favour,' says such a one, 'why am I hurried, and almost distracted with violent temptations from day to day? The powers of darkness seem to be let loose upon me; the enemy thrusts at me sore that I should fall, and comes against me like a roaring lion, ready to devour. My life is one continued conflict.'

Have you not read of a certain eminent saint, who had a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him? Was this an indication that he had no interest in the divine favour? Just the contrary; there was given him a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure. If the Lord suffers you to be violently assaulted by temptation, it is neither for want of love to your person, nor for want of power to deliver you; but for wise ends and purposes. Perhaps you are thus exercised to keep you humble, to make you more sensible of your constant need of him who is able to succour those that are tempted, to stir you up to watchfulness and fervent prayer, to induce you to make use of the shield of faith, whereby you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one, to make the final conquest the more glorious, and to render death more desirable, and heaven more welcome.

SECT. II.

Of Assurance of Interest in the Favour of God.

A well-grounded, habitual persuasion of interest in the divine favour, is certainly a privilege which has been enjoyed by many, and which may still be experienced by real christians in our day. The
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Lord has been pleased to make provision for the comfort of his people, in a matter of such vast importance. *Paul* was persuaded, that nothing could separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Was this persuasion an appendage to his office, as an apostle? The contrary, I think, is evident. This was a part of his experience as a christian; and it is a privilege which lies equally open to us. For we have the same gospel, and the same promises as he had. The efficacy of the teaching, sanctifying and comforting operations of the Holy Spirit, cannot be weakened by length of time; his power and grace are the same they were in former ages.

Were the promises of God respecting salvation conditional, they would not be a proper foundation for an assured expectation of receiving what is so promised. But as these promises are absolute, they ascertain the possession of that to which they relate; since he that has made them is faithful, and has promised nothing but what he is able to perform. The tenor of such promises as have respect to eternal salvation is, *I will*, and *they shall*; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." In their nature therefore, the promises are suited to produce and support a holy confidence towards God.

The Almighty has confirmed these promises by an oath, for this exprefs purpose, that those who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them, might have strong consolation; this consolation arises from the two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, the promise and the oath of Jehovah, giving them assurance of his favour, and of their security in consequence of it.

The witnessing and sealing of the Holy Spirit may serve to convince us, that those to whom he bears witness of their being the children of God, and those whom he seals to the day of redemption, must be assured of their interest in the divine favour. Sealing is consequent on believing; "After that ye believed, ye were sealed." It is likewise the office of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in real christians as the Spirit of adoption, enabling them to address God as their Father, through Jesus Christ, with boldness, liberty, and confidence.

There have been many, in all ages, who have witnessed what we are now speaking of, who have been well assured, on solid grounds, of their interest in the favour of their Maker. They have been able to adopt, with propriety, the language of his people recorded in the sacred scriptures, and to rejoice in the glorious benefits flowing from the
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fountain of redeeming love. They have said, "The Lord is my light, and my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. He loved me, and gave himself for me. We have known and believed the love that God hath unto us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him!"

If many professors of religion in the present day fall short of this privilege, there is certainly a cause for it, and that cause lies at their own door. This privilege is not to be enjoyed without the diligent use of those means, which God hath appointed for our increase and growth in grace. It is not to be enjoyed without self-denial, watchfulness and circumspection. It is never experienced, in any comfortable degree, but in the assiduous practice of religious duties; such as prayer, reading the word of God, meditation, self-examination, and a constant attendance on the worship of God. Those who expect to enjoy the privilege in question, in the neglect of these means, do but deceive themselves. They may exclaim, if they please, against remarks of this kind, as favouring of legality; we know that God has been pleased to connect the end with the means; and what he has joined together, let no man think to put asunder.

der. Let me entreat you to regard what the apostle says to the *Hebrews*; "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." The full assurance of hope is a special degree of its advancement and improvement. A weak and imperfect hope will give but a weak and imperfect relief under trouble; but that which riseth up to a full assurance will carry us comfortably through all the difficulties and afflictions attendant on the present state. Now diligence is necessary to be shewn, if we would enjoy this full assurance of hope. This is God's appointment: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Diligence hath a proper and natural tendency to the end proposed. For by the use of diligence, we grow in grace, so that our interest in the promises of God is cleared up unto us. There is no instance wherein we may allow ourselves to lay aside this diligence; for it must be shewn unto the end. There is no condition in life wherein it will not be necessary. It must be maintained, if we would enjoy the full assurance of hope, till we are absolutely discharged from our warfare.

Many

Many fall short of a settled assurance of interest in the divine favour, for want of seeking it. Could they be persuaded to pray for themselves, with that earnestness and importunity which the apostle *Paul* discovered with respect to others, they would, no doubt, be brought to experience the privilege in question. "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner-man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Would those who are at uncertainties concerning their spiritual state, be prevailed upon to seek with diligence, earnestness, and perseverance for what

what is requested in these petitions, they certainly would be brought to experience what they have not yet known. For it is said by him that cannot lie, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." The plain matter of fact then is, "Ye have not because ye ask not." O that you would be entreated to make the experiment, and see whether the God of truth and grace will falsify his own word.

Some walk perpetually in the dark respecting their interest in the divine favour, through the indulgence of some known sin. Conscience! speak; thou art a witness for God. Discharge thy office faithfully. Arrest the guilty reader, and urge him him here to make a solemn pause. Though no one was farther from a legal spirit than the apostle *Paul*; though no one was more dependent upon Jesus Christ for acceptance with the Father; yet he says, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards men."

If we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, how is it possible to preserve a comfortable sense of our
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interest in the favour of God; since the Holy Spirit will, in that case, be grieved, and withdraw his evidence in our behalf? But could we retain our hope towards God, we certainly should not be easy or happy. If a traveller were sure of reaching his journey's end in safety, yet if he walked a great part of the way with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn, as is justly observed by a pious writer, will be felt in the conscience, till we are favoured with true simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great and small, to yield obedience to the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without wilfully admitting a single exception. It must be owned, that the best and holiest of men are conscious of innumerable failings, imperfections and miscarriages; yet their hearts being upright, these things will not break their peace. But if we trifle with light received, and connive at what we know to be wrong, our hands will be weak, and our minds dark, restless, and uncomfortable. Many, who, one would hope, are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because of the indulgence of some secret sin. They are as distant from the enjoyment of that happiness which arises from a sense of interest in the divine favour, as they are from the possibility of reconciling

ciling the incompatible services of God and *Mammon*.

Reader, beware of that reluctance to self-examination which is so common to the human mind. Look into your own heart; search and try your ways, that you may find out that which deprives you of the comfortable sense of God's favour. Let your spirit make diligent search, that you may discover the latent iniquity which robs you of so great a privilege. And if you find it, do not spare it; but, humbling yourself in the sight of the Lord, seek for pardon; and cry to him who is able to save, for deliverance from the sin which easily besets you. Say with *Job*, "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, (O God) and holdest me for thine enemy? Make me to know my transgression, and my sin." God giveth grace unto the humble. "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. He comforteth those that are cast down. He dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Beware of neglecting God's ordinances. Diligently wait upon him in his appointments. Give good heed to the ministration of his holy word. Harken and hear what the Lord speaks by his ministers; for he will speak peace to his people and

to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly. Open your heart to those whom God has appointed to comfort the feeble-minded, and to support the weak.—Use these means diligently and conscientiously. Wait on the Lord, and he will save you.

Steadily aim at a conformity to the will of God, both in heart and life. Walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long, and make it your constant care to please him. “His salvation is nigh them that fear him. Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” If you favour sin, it is impossible you should enjoy a comfortable assurance of God’s favour; for “your iniquity will separate between you and your God.” It will interpose, as a thick mist, to hide his face from you. If you grow indolent, negligent, and of a worldly spirit, you need not wonder to find yourself involved in darkness and perplexity respecting your state towards God; for he hath said, “If ye walk contrary unto me, I also will walk contrary unto you.”

It must be owned, as has been before observed, that some pious and upright minds are suffered, for a time, to be involved in darkness through the prevalence of sore temptations; others are awfully tried by spiritual desertions; and others again are
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subject to a kind of constitutional melancholy. All these are objects of pity; and the Lord will eventually appear for their comfort and deliverance. He hath said, "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." He will heal the broken in heart, and bind up their wounds.

Some are prevented from enjoying an assurance of the divine favour through causeless fears and jealousies. These are constantly encouraged not to fear, by him who knows the feebleness of their faith, and the weakness of their hands. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God. Fear not, thou worm *Jacob*; neither be dismayed, ye men of *Israel*." They are afraid, because sin is in them as an active and restless principle, that they have no contrary principle of grace or holiness. And, because, for a season they have not strong consolation, they are afraid they have no right to it, nor to any other spiritual blessing. These jealousies and fears, at least, evidence a desire to be right, and to be conformed to the will and image of God; which certainly springs from a gracious principle. In these persons, the want of skill to distinguish between the motions of the flesh, and those of the Spirit, is the occasion of their

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their distressing fear. They ought to reason thus, He that sincerely repents of sin, believes in Jesus, and is desirous of giving his whole heart to God, is in a state of acceptance with his Maker, according to the declarations of his word; I cannot deny but this is my case; therefore, why do I entertain these disquieting fears?

It may be of service to such persons, to call to mind past experience, and to think of God's gracious dealings with them. "I call to remembrance my song in the night; I commune with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. And I said, This is my infirmity (to entertain these gloomy fears, and desponding thoughts;) but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me;" this I must own; then observe what he saith to you at present, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Let this be for your comfort.

After all, it must be acknowledged, that the true, solid and rational assurance of hope is often the result of many severe trials. When young disciples are filled with comfort, peace and joy, they are, for that season, strangers to doubts and fears respecting their acceptance with God. But this is not that assurance of which the scriptures speak.

No sooner are their comforts withdrawn, than they are filled with perplexity, disquieted with fears, and ready to count all their former experience mere delusion. Assurance grows, and is established by repeated conflicts, and by renewed experimental proofs of God's power to save and deliver us. When we have been brought low, and helped by his gracious hand; sorely wounded, and healed again; cast down, and raised up; when we have given up all hope, and been suddenly snatched from danger, and exalted to a place of safety;—when we have experienced these troubles and reliefs a thousand times over, we learn to trust simply to the word and power of God, in every state and condition. This trust, this hope, when habitual and strong, becomes like an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, in all the storms of life. It bears, when thus confirmed, the name of assurance. But in this holy confidence there are many degrees.

This assurance is built upon a foundation that cannot be shaken, though it is often much assaulted. It does not depend on occasional and changeable frames of mind, nor upon any thing precarious; but upon the word of infallible truth, and an agreement and correspondence in the christian's experience with that word. Nor does this agreement de-

depend altogether on a train of laboured arguments and deductions, but is self-evident to the gracious mind. For "he that believeth hath the witness in himself." The most simple and unlearned may be the subjects of it, in a way as extensive and satisfactory, as the most wise and learned.

This holy confidence may be maintained in a believer, even under darkness, and the hidings of God's face. He that walketh in darkness, and hath, comparatively, no light of divine comfort, is encouraged, and even commanded to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God. He is to do this when the cheering rays of the Sun of righteousness do not shine upon his mind, so as to afford him the refreshing light of extraordinary consolation and joy. Hereby, the soul of a christian is preserved tranquil and composed, though it hath not that degree of pleasure, which springs from the affecting manifestations of divine love.

This holy confidence carries the mind above the afflictive and distressing things of this world. As it swims not upon a torrent of terrestrial pleasures, so it is not deeply depressed by the heavy weight of worldly sorrows. He who is well satisfied respecting his interest in the divine favour, is not elevated by the most flattering things which may attend him in this mortal state; neither is he,

like other men, greatly disquieted when he is deprived of earthly enjoyments; for he knows that in God's favour there is life. His language therefore is, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation." In prosperity he is kept humble and modest; in affliction, submissive and patient; because he is persuaded, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." He glories in tribulation, since "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost."

SECT. III.

The Duty and Privilege of those who are satisfied respecting their Interest in the Divine Favour.

IT certainly becomes those who are satisfied, on good grounds, respecting their interest in the favour of God, to be very thankful. You ought to prize the privilege very highly, and to adore the

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Author of peace and consolation, for having brought you into this safe and happy state. You had no natural right to this distinguishing blessing, neither could you possibly have procured it by any meritorious actions of your own. If *Mephibosheth* was so affected with the kindness of *David* to him, that he exclaimed, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look on such a dead dog as I am!" How should the kindness and love of God affect your heart, and inflame your gratitude? Surely, it becometh the just to be thankful, and to express their thankfulness in songs of praise. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercy."

It becomes you to keep in memory the various instances of God's goodness to you, and to endeavour to improve them in the best manner you are able. When *Mary*, the mother of Jesus, received gracious messages from heaven, she kept them in remembrance, and pondered them in her heart. Go you, and do likewise. Let not the tokens of divine love be forgotten. Walk worthy of the exalted privileges you enjoy. In all your words, works and ways, be afraid of offending your gra-

cious Benefactor. Seek constantly to please him, by doing his will from the heart. After you have received the sweetest pledges of his love, you are still in danger of grieving the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption. Keep therefore a jealous eye over your own heart; watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.

It becomes you to improve the distinguishing kindness of God to you, for the benefit of others. Say, with the Psalmist, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul." When a seasonable opportunity offers, speak to your children, your servants, your companions, and your christian brethren, concerning the pleasantness and the peace which are to be found in wisdom's ways. Say to them, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him!" Recommend his service from your own experience; assuring them that his commands are not grievous, but that his yoke is easy, and his burden light. You have good reason to speak well of his name, and to be telling of his salvation from day to day. Be fervent and constant in prayer and supplication to God, for the conversion of sinners, and the revival of his work among his professing people. As you have obtained mercy, and have the sweet enjoyment

joyment of the divine favour, pour out your hearts before God, that others may also find mercy with him. Thus *Abraham*, the friend of God, interceded for his son, "Oh that *Ishmael* might live in thy sight!" When you have sweet intercourse with the Father of mercies, plead with him for others. It was the request of a certain person to his intimate friend (*cum sic tibi fuerit, memento mei*) 'when it shall be thus with you, remember me.'

It becomes you to long, to hope, and to wait for the full enjoyment of God's favour in heaven. The sweet and comfortable assurance of his love to you, in your present state of distance from him, should make you restless till you are advanced to the full and final fruition of it in glory. Let the tastes you have of it here, quicken your desires after a full draught of the fountain of life and bliss in the upper world. In the morning of the resurrection, when you awake in the divine likeness, you shall be satisfied. Be constantly looking for the coming of the day of God, and hastening to it. Wait on the Lord, and he will save you, and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom. The righteous go from distant communion with their Redeemer on earth to intimate fellowship with him in heaven. "*Moses*, the servant of the Lord, died, according to the word of the Lord." The Jewish Rabbins read

read it (*ad osculum Jehovæ*) at the mouth or kiss of Jehovah. The Lord took him away in a sweet embrace. He was then honoured with the appellation of the *servant of the Lord*, as expressive of the intimacy he had with his divine Master in this world, and of his admittance into the immediate presence of the same Master in the regions of immortality. The soul at death goes to receive the result of its labours; the reward, not of debt, but of grace. Jesus has said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servants be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." To which we may add the words of the apostle to the *Colossians*, "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ." Keep this in view, and be daily longing, hoping, and waiting for it.

I shall close all with the following meditation, by way of paraphrase, on the text which I have endeavoured to explain and enforce through the whole of this treatise.

The divine word informs me, and my own experience bears witness to the delightful truth, that *In his favour there is life*. To this I can set my seal; so that what many others do but read, I, a
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poor sinful worm, am made to feel. Were I denied the sweet enjoyment of his favour, my heart would be pained; I should faint and languish. Had I never tasted the precious benefit, I should never have known how good it is. But I know in whom I have believed; I know whom I have loved; and how do I long that my weary soul may rest in the bosom of his love! His benignity is better than life. I long to have a full draught of his love, or rather, to be overwhelmed in this unbounded ocean.

Absence from him, whose favour has won my heart, is the sharpest pain I now feel. O that the veil, which hides from me the bright vision of his face, were but once removed! I long to see him as he is. Since his love has warmed my once-frozen breast, my heart is not my own; I have given my warmest affections to him, and cannot forbear to cry, "When shall I come, and appear before God!"

Farewell, delusive world; my heart glows with an ardour which nothing beneath the sun could possibly inspire. The brightest things below the skies have no charms for me, in comparison with him who is the chiefest among ten thousands, and altogether lovely. The favour of the great, the riches of the wealthy, and the delights of the vain,
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are mean and despicable things. When the light of God's countenance is lifted up upon me, I can look on this captivating world with disdain, and deem the mightiest monarch poor, who knows nothing of the favour of the King of kings.

How am I indebted to the riches of infinite love! The merciful Redeemer saw me, all wretched and forlorn, a helpless orphan, cast out in the open field, polluted in mine own blood, to the loathing of my person; he pitied my helpless case, took me up in his arms, cherished me in his bosom, washed me from my filthiness, adorned me with his comeliness, and said unto me, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." O how great is his mercy! I am now emboldened to claim a personal interest in his favour, and to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." His love is absolutely free. There was enough in me to provoke his eternal abhorrence; but he hath mercy on whom, and because he will have mercy.

Assist me, ye celestial intelligences, ye angels of light, assist me to admire and adore his love. Teach me, in strains like your own, to celebrate the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of redeeming grace.

The tokens of divine favour are sweet beyond expression. They banish the fears and inquietudes of

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of the pained heart ; they alleviate the crosses and afflictions of life, and brighten the horrors of death and the grave. Blest with the smiles of his face, who loved me, and gave himself for me, I can cheerfully submit to every chastisement of his hand ; knowing that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Welcome disease, welcome every pain, which indicates the speedy dissolution of this tabernacle, and portends the hour of my release from the burdens of the flesh. These breaches in the walls of my prison-house admit the rays of celestial light, and assure me, that my longing soul shall speedily gain her happy dismissal, and fly to the bosom of her Saviour. Go on, O Lord, to accomplish in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power. Let thy light shine brighter and brighter, unto the perfect day. Then farewell groans, and tears, and complaints ; farewell darkness and eclipses of the Sun of righteousness ; farewell glimmering hopes and gloomy fears ; faith itself will then be turned into sight, and hope into everlasting fruition. Welcome ye pleasures which flow at God's right hand for evermore ! When I partake of these I shall know, that " IN HIS FAVOUR IS LIFE ! "

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